

## Human Resources Management Education: The Challenging Impacts of Looking Glass Self And Pygmalion Effect

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### **Abstract**

*The success of every workforce depends to a large extent on the quality of the human resources available. This quality of the workforce depends on the level of flourishing or 'good-spirited' experience of the workforce. Workers need always to be in 'good spirit' in order to put their optimal. Many things bring about the flourishing of workers which make them put in their best for the success of the organisation. One of such ways is not to downplay the esteem and ego of individual workers. Low self esteem affects the quality of productivity. Managers should be conscious of actions that downplay the self esteem of their workers.*

*This piece is an effort to enlighten those responsible for various workforces to be wary of what is known as the 'looking glass self' and the 'Pygmalion effect' and their impacts on the self esteem and productivity of their workers. Many managers may be advertently or inadvertently acting in ways that promote these two variables in their organisations. It advised on how to guard against these for the sake of a happy and productive workforce.*

**Keywords:** Looking Glass Self, Pygmalion Effect, Human Resources, Pimping, Psychological Safety

### **Introduction**

A happy workforce is a productive workforce and a productive workforce is a happy workforce. This is an axiomatic statement that became serendipitously epiphanic in the quest of researchers to find out the best way to achieve productivity. Productivity hinged solely on the quality of available human resources in any organization. Thus, the available human resources and how to use them to achieve the maximum productivity became the preoccupation of the management of any organisation. This sparked off the issue of what is today known as 'Human Resources Development', which metamorphose into Competency Based Management.

What is today known as 'Human Resource Management and Development' started as 'Scientific Management', which was later overtaken as 'Welfare Management'. When the theories of welfare management started losing attraction, another school of thought came to limelight with the idea of Human Relations, which

laid emphasis on the management of the people that constitute the workforce of the organisation. Thus, through their research findings, there was a great paradigm shift which de-emphasised money as the mainstream motivator and laid great emphasis on the social aspects of organisations. This emphasis on social aspects of work succeeded in ridding the feelings of alienation, boredom, normlessness, etc. The workplace became a second home, and work became less stressful. With the view to sustain the tempo, a department that had to take care of such a situation was initiated and it became known as the 'Personnel Department'. This marked the advent of 'Personnel Management'.

Personnel Management held sway till the '80s. With the advancement in technology and the spread of industrialisation, it became indisputably obvious that the quality of workforce remained the panacea for organisational effectiveness and productivity. The preoccupation then became how to manage and maintain the available workforce and thus cropped up the issue of Human Resource Management and Development. From this stage, the issue of human resources was no longer a case of one particular department but a challenge that now cuts across all units of every organisation. The onus of development of the workforce became that of every unit head, boss or supervisor as the case may be. In effect, the development rate of any organisation will largely depend on the wealth of knowledge possessed by the organisation's management cadres, their productivity and their psychological dispositions and understanding of and tolerance of the socio-cultural aspects of the employees.

In this digital age, it is a popular truism that 'garbage in, garbage out' and that 'knowledge in, development out'. With the advent of globalisation, coupled with its competitive nature, every organisation is guarding against being the old MacDonaldd that had a farm but a giant corporation bought it away from him. The available human resources that cost an organisation a fortune to engage and train, should not be meddled with, bearing in mind the cost of recruitment and training of new staff. Thus, the issue of people management, which, calls for the treatment of people as individuals with values and rational beings becomes the rule in this globalised era. This is the purview of this article. This article stresses the need for managers and management, irrespective of whatever background and leanings, to be conscious of the implications of the Pygmalion effect and the looking glass self. Both the Pygmalion and the looking glass self are attitudes and behaviour that impact and diminish the self esteem of workers and individuals. These concepts will be analysed and expatiated later in the next section.

Many organisations experience low productivity, sabotage and even industrial espionage because the managers are ignorant of the impacts of looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect on their organisations. Their attitudes and behaviours impact negatively on the self esteem of their workers. Workers may be well remunerated but productivity refuses to reach the required or expected target.

This should be a cause for concern. Humans do not tolerate the downplaying of their self esteem. This is why Mill (2009) pointed out that 'it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than to be a pig satisfied.'

It is good to note that the world of work includes the maids and servants hired in various households. The looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect play significant impacts on the productivity of these maids and servants. The public space is full of reported cases of nefarious activities of these group of household workforce. This is a typical exemplum of what damages these variables under discussion in this paper can wreck on any organisation.

### **Conceptualisation**

#### **Human Resources (Management and Development)**

Of the four factors of, or resources for production; land; labour, capital and people (human resources), only human resources is capable of converting or manipulating the other three to yield profit or complete the production process. Resources are means of profiteering from the entrepreneurial perspective and as such only the human aspect of the resources can galvanise the profiteering action towards realisation. The training and development of these human resources once their services are contracted can easily be realised to a certain extent. This is based on their possession of intellect, which allows them to acquire human knowledge. One can therefore sanguinely argue that the problem with human resources is not in their training and development but in their management based on the fact that they possess the same capacity and faculty for both reasoning and understanding but differ in personality (disposition, motivation, stability, emotional balance, etc.)

The management of human resources entails a complex mix as people of diverse personality build-ups converge under one organisation. Fortunately, the issue of human resources management and development is no longer an exclusive affair of any specific department in the organisation as such its management can be effectively handled if supervisors and managers are wary and circumspect of the implications of mismanagement of subordinates' personalities traits and dispositions.

**The Looking Glass Self:** the concept of the looking glass self was developed by Charles Horton Cooley. This is following his classic and famous statement Cooley (2018):

*Each to each a looking glass  
reflects the other that doth pass.*

The looking glass self is simply explaining that the society is a mirror, a looking glass on which each individual member looks at himself/herself to see his/her reflection in it. It makes one conscious of what the society is saying or feeling about one. As Cooley (2018) explained:

“As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because

they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it". (Cooley, 2018)

This analysis is saying that what the society says about someone is bound to influence the life of that person positively or negatively as the case may be. This is what we hope to see in 'Pygmalion effect' later on.

Cooley reached the summation that this social influence takes three stages to be arrived at:

1<sup>st</sup> Stage – The imagination of our appearance to the other person

2<sup>nd</sup> stage - The imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and

3<sup>rd</sup> – Experience of feeling (self) to the above two reactions as pride or mortification.

This third stage involves responding to ourselves in the same way others might respond to us and also take the role of the other towards ourselves.

**The Pygmalion Effect:** The idea or concept of the Pygmalion effect was developed in the writing of George Bernard Shaw in his work 'Pygmalion'. The bottom line here is 'garbage in, garbage out'; 'good input, good output'. In the Pygmalion one of the characters, Miss Liza (Eliza) Doolittle narrated her resolve to Pickering about the way she is treated:

You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (dressing and proper way of speaking, and so on) the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will. (Shaw, 2018)

As seen from the ongoing, the way people treat and regard one is the way one will react and respond to them. If you trust or believe that someone is capable of something, and that and conversely. Because Professor Higgins sees Eliza as a flower girl, she became influenced by that and thus sees herself behaving like a flower girl to Higgins whereas she behaves like a lady to Pickering because of the positive perspective he has of her. These are the attitudinal 'effects' Higgins garbage in a flower girl and Eliza appeared and acted as a flower girl whereas Pickering inputted a good lady and she vowed to work and act as a lady to Pickering.

One important inference here is that even if Eliza is really a flower girl, she has the potential to change to or become a lady only that Higgins was totally blind to this potentiality. This is the missing link, the Archimedean point that every management that hinges its productivity on the workforce must not ignore.

One thing which remains very crucial is that the importance of self esteem is very crucial that management cannot ignore such in their day to day human resources functions. This is because as Bandura (1995) pointed out; much of the behaviours of employees is motivated and regulated by internal stands and self-evaluative reactions to their own actions.

Many other variables might be contributory to these two issues in the workplace. This is more especially in the Nigerian and many other African settings. One significant factor is nepotism. The nepotistic individuals and managers might take joy in promoting conditions that make manifest the looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect. This is more obtainable in the public sector, not entirely ruling out the private sectors. Nepotism can unleash many unwholesome experiences on the workforce and on the long run affect the flourishing of workers and their productivity.

**Education:** Education remains one of the strongest pillars of development and most importantly human development. Education from the tripod perspective (formal, informal and nonformal) remains invaluable in all human endeavours. This is based on the fact that, from birth, all activities embarked upon by humans, for their survival and progress, can never avoid any of these strands of the concept of education. Man is being educated whether asleep or awake.

The process of education involves many variables such as: teaching, training, instruction, mentoring, tutoring, coaching, etc. In human resources management and education, any and a combination of these processes would ensure an improvement on the status quo. The cogency for incorporating this aspect in this paper is that both the looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect can torpedo the processes of education for human resources development. This is based on the fact of experience of this author in the process of teaching and learning.

The looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect share the same effect with 'pimping' which brings about the idea of 'psychological safety'. Pimping is popular in the medical education sector. According to Brancati(1989) to whom the credit of popularizing of the term and concept 'pimping' was associated with, he pointed out that pimping was used by health educators and medical superiors who pose difficult questions to learners and subordinates with the intention of embarrassing or belittling them. This is equally evidenced in the works of Detsky (2009). Detsky acknowledged Brancati as the one who popularised the term 'pimping'. For him, one of the ways to mitigate pimping and its impacts on subordinates is to ensure that their self esteem is respected. This is one the educational challenges of human resources management and development. Psychological safety according to Edmondson (2018) points to the fact that learners and team workers and even management are afraid of being exposed of any ignorance before their peers. Such impacts negatively on their self esteem. This is similar to what bordered Eliza Doolittle in the

*Pygmalion*. Similar findings were found in Goebel et al.(2019) where learners experienced negative emotions and reduced self-esteem.

Teachers, instructors, mentors, coaches, need to be aware of these variables in the entire processes and stages of human resources education and development. These are some of the clogs and landmines that need to be meticulously avoided for a successful educational and development programmes.

### **Impacts**

It is said that what one calls one's dog, it answers and also if you start praising a toad, it will leap like a frog. This underscores the strategic role of 'morale' management in human resources education and development. The issue of management or mismanagement of the morale of a worker is not limited, on one hand, to the human resources department but also to the public and customers. At times one observes that the countenance of workers elicits a certain observable comments and impressions from clients which might lead to whistle-blowing the organisation as either a people-oriented organisation or any other plausible qualification on the negative side.

Consider how an employee would feel if after putting in the best and the boss reels out a chain of curses or condemnation to you or your work and never cared a hoot about how you felt. Your initiative will be killed and person feel wounded that you would prefer that he dictates or monitor and approve every step in the work production process to be on the defensive to absolve yourself from any blame. This is often the spoor of decay of complacency and resistance to change in certain situations.

Mr A had two typists in the office typing pool, lady B and lady C. lady B never types reports or documents without skipping some lines that sends her back retyping to the chagrin of Mr A who never fails to reel out curses and abuses for wastage of time and materials. But lady C is very accurate and meticulous but not as fast as lady B. Mr A does appreciate her work but frowns at her slow pace. He nevertheless continued to encourage her to try and increase her typing speed. Lady B who feels very bitter with the whole scenario decided to adopt a measure to correct her short sightedness by marking or numbering with pencils, the lines typed. This improvement she never revealed to Mr A. Whenever Mr A's personal aide brings out typing work, lady B will decline saying that she doesn't want any abuse for the day but she does accept work from other in the organisation. In essence, people tend to have two personalities - positive and negative and each is exhibited to a particular mirror/glass on which we are reflecting or imaging.

If lady C had not been in the employ of the organisation, or, if lady B had been the sole typist for the organisation, Mr A would have disengaged her or relieved her of her position. This would have cost the organisation a fortune to hunt for her replacement. A situation that would have been taken care of, if Mr A were to be a good worker-morale manager. Many workers who find themselves in lady B's circumstances leave on their own to find a friendlier workplace.

The research of Adler (2007) which revolves round the same issue, serves also as an analogy to the looking glass self and Pygmalion effect. This study involved American employees in a Filipino organisation in relation to attitude management. These American employees despised the way their Filipino supervisor constantly looked over their shoulders, checking their works, attitudes and punctuality. These employees said that they found this attitude of their supervisor very condescending and counterproductive. He said that as a group, the employees thought of themselves as basically trustworthy, but they decided that since the boss seemed to have no respect for them, they would give him the same treatment in return (the Pygmalion effect). The result created a work environment that was filled with mistrust and hostility.

The importance of morale-management in human resources management and development has been emphasised earlier by Roethlisberger(2014) in his work 'Management and Morale' and that of Roethlisberger and Dickson (2003) in their work 'Management and the Worker'. This was equally emphasised by Ali et al. (2002) in what was termed 'Emotional Intelligence'. The message of emotional intelligence points to the fact that the ability to manage oneself and to build better relationships with others is vital for successful attitude management. One has to be aware of one's feelings of others, and always act with honesty and openness. To act with emotional intelligence entails being aware of, and regulating one's emotions and when one is sensitive to the emotions of others. It involves getting to know one's needs well. Most importantly it demands that one has to pay attention to the emotional state of other people, so that one can tune one's assertions sensitively. It costs organisations nothing to manage their workers morale but costs them fortune when they mismanage such. Workers have feelings, pride and the unfavourable economic conditions can never make them to relegate them to oblivion as they become dehumanised or demeaned.

### **The Challenges**

Comments and remarks often are cues from which subjects pick up. The 'Looking Glass Self' and the 'Pygmalion Effect' are all cues in either boosting the morale of or demoralising the subordinate worker. There are ways an individual will act towards another or have a view about another and that another will be acting towards the individual in that way (as with the case of the American employees). The

same goes for organisations and their workers. The lessons of the Looking Glass Self and the Pygmalion Effect call for a total attitudinal and behavioural change towards subordinates. They should also guide educators and other personnel involved in the development of human resources. Their ignorance of and on these has cost organisations fortunes without their knowing the causal factors and many managers and human resources developers are grossly culpable. Temperaments and emotional balance have to be put as some of the criteria for the appointment of supervisors and team leaders. They should undergo training on the importance of positive attitude management. They should ensure the psychological safety of people working with them. This is parts and parcel of the sociology of knowledge.

The point of the challenge here is the belief in potentials, employee's or subordinate's potentials. The success of holistic workforce training and development hinges on this and this can only be achieved if there is a change for positive attitude of all supervisors and managers towards their subordinates. There is no greater motivation of an individual than that individual discovering that his supervisor believes greatly in his or her potentials. He will be eager and willing to undertake any assignment. This position has already been discovered by Edmondson (1999, 2018) in his 'psychological safety'.

A boss or supervisor is not known by being the 'bossy' type that feels that without being sarcastic and appearing over-perfect in all things, subordinates will not accord or recognise the position as a position of authority. This is one of the usual spoors of decay in attitude management in many organisations. This is why in many occasions, those at the top are guilty of 'pimping'.

It is also noteworthy that employees tend to work more effectively especially when they feel motivated. Especially when their psychological safety is guaranteed. On the other hand, they become troublesome when they are neglected, motivation wise. As Ali et al (2002) admonished, human resources managers have to be aware of the different ways in which people in their organisations are motivated and recognised so that every one will respond to the same reward. He held that a manager or supervisor should, as a cogency, identify which of his/her actions motivate the different employees in the organisation, and which actions are demotivating, in order to enhance the employee's effectiveness and productivity.

The Nigerian situation is also very challenging. Nigerian workplaces have high volatility rate from the variables of exclusion which range from religion to ethnic origin and to party affiliations. (This perspective can be appreciated from the findings of Odogwu and Nnonyelu (2021). The findings decried the negative impacts of religion and related issues on, and in impeding, employee's performance in



Nigerian organisations). These variables of exclusion are carried to the workplace. It incurs negative aspects of both the Pygmalion and looking glass self. Workplace managers need to be wary of the impacts of invoking and provoking these variables in the Nigerian workplace. They are often budding points of workplace sabotage and even bullying and harassment. The workplace, especially the private workplace is striving after clientele and profit maximization. Public organisations that are service oriented cannot risk low productivity because of these negativities. The impacts of religion and ethnicity in workplaces was found to have influenced productivity in a study by **Wale-oshinowo and Ogunbufumi (2021)**. In fine, workplace managers should be wary of the effects of both the Pygmalion and the looking glass self. Multiculturalism is a global concern. Nigeria and other African settings should embrace multiculturalism under the umbrella of multi-ethnic tolerance. This is one of the roads to progress and success.

Globalisation also poses its own challenges in this issue of the looking glass self and Pygmalion effect. Globalisation is breaking and defying cultural boundaries and international management is demanding the tolerance of workforce or team-management with cultural pluralism. The Adler study of American employees in a Filipino management cited earlier serves as a good case in point. Individuals in a global organisation have their different cultural backgrounds and therefore it will be a wrong message to try and give the impression that they have to abandon their various cultures and adapt to that of the manager or supervisor as the case may be. To attempt to compare cultures will only incur the wrath of such expatriates and this will definitely affect their morale and total productivity. Productivity, we have to note, is an attitude. If the attitude of employees and indeed subordinates are managed well, then the route to increased productivity is clearly visible and smooth.

In the Nigerian situation where the labour market is over saturated and those already employed guard against job losses by every possible means, to think or presume that since you are the boss, that your subordinates have no much options than to keep mute under whatever psychological tutelage you subject them. Under such conditions, the subordinate is virtually on transit to the next available organisation that is ready and willing to enlist his or her services. This is how many supervisors deplete qualified human resources that organisations spent fortunes to engage and train.

Human beings are what they are. They need the respect and tolerance. This quest for respect and tolerance is a serious challenge as many organisations are in most cases seen as exploitation camps for migrant workers. Some of these migrant workers are unnecessarily exploited and helpless. This why, at the latest opportunity, they quit the organization.

There are words and ways that can be used to motivate individuals to transcend their limitations and expectations or even maintain a steady and healthy pace. This can bring about job satisfaction on the side of employees. When employees encounter abusive bosses, who are uncouth in their expressions, impudent in attitudes and behaviours, their self esteem becomes wounded. Such ways used by managers in encountering their subordinates makes their sense of self esteem become harmed. The employees would begin to act like Eliza Doolittle decided to be relating to, and acting towards Professor Higgins. Employees are always conscious of how they are treated. From the looking glass self perspective, a worker's experience and feelings of the management's or superior's attitude towards him or her will definitely affect his or her morale. In fine, the bottom lines of the looking glass self and the Pygmalion effect is that management should be careful not to unnecessarily harm the self esteem of their workers.

### **Conclusion**

The Looking Glass Self and the Pygmalion Effect are all dialectics in human relations. Only circumspection can make people realise their strategic implications and importance in both ordinary transitory relationships and in formal organisational human resources management and development. Every individual human being has pride and this pride the individual jealously guards at all levels whether at home or outside.

The golden rule serves as a focal paradigm in any further hermeneutical analyses of the leitmotif of this essay. Human beings have feelings, pride, and most importantly values and these are sacrosanct. These, they will forever like to protect in all relationships. Any other effort to make them lose or taint such will not augur well for the obtainable level of relationship. Every manager, supervisor should endeavour to deal properly with the attitude and morale of his or her subordinate employees for a successful human resources management and development

### **Suggestion**

- Managers should be culturally sensitive. Cultural comparisons in work organisations are odious. The globe is now culturally plural – cultural pluralism.

- There is need for attitudinal and behavioural changes and modifications on the side of management. Workers are not in slavery or servitude in their organisations. They are still humans with feelings and pride. They protect well their self esteem and reputation.
- There is need to appreciate the importance of the psychological safety of the workers. Fear, intimidation, stereotyping, etc are barriers to a happy and productive workforce.

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