

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON EMPLOYABILITY AND WORK ETHIC, AND THE ROLE OF TERTIARY EDUCATORS ON GRADUATES PREPAREDNESS IN BOTSWANA

*Virginiah Ndung'u*  
Botswana Accountancy College, Botswana

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## Abstract

Botswana, though rated as one of the poorest countries in Africa at independence, has through fiscal discipline and sound management, transformed herself to a middle-income country. However, she remains largely dependent on diamond, hence the need to diversify through among others the creation of skilled workforce. In the GCR2013-2014, 2 out of the top 4 factors identified as the most problematic factors for doing business in the country were poor work ethic in national labour force (*for the sixth consecutive year*) and inadequately educated workforce. Poor work ethic in Botswana can be traced from as far back as during colonial time and has persisted up to date. According to Kartha, D.(2012), culture encompasses among others, attitude, beliefs and values, all of which impacts deeply on one's attitude toward life and work. One of the goals of education is to prepare young people to participate in paid work as employees or self-employed. However the education programme in Botswana has been criticized as weak in terms of among others "less relevant for the labour market". NDP10 identifies the challenge of training high quality graduates with skills relevant to the country's economic and social development and ability to compete in global labour markets. Hence there is urgent need to re-look the educators' role in equipping graduates with the necessary employability skills and work ethic.

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**Keywords:** Employability, Work Ethic, Culture, Attitude, Globalization

## Introduction

Botswana is a landlocked country located in Southern region of Africa, bordering South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Its physical size is 600,370sq km and a population of 2.004 million (2012 census). Botswana was rated as one of the poorest countries in Africa in 1966 when she obtained her independence.



According to Siphambe (2010), there were few schools, 1 brigade and a small number of educated Batswana. Over the years Botswana has experienced one of the highest growth rates, mainly due to the substantial mineral deposits particularly diamond mining which has fueled much of Botswana's economic expansion and currently accounts for more than one-third of GDP and for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of export earnings. Other minerals are copper, nickel, salt, soda ash, potash, coal, iron ore and silver. According to the Botswana Resource Sector Overview (2013/14), the total mineral revenue for FY 2012/2013 was about P12.99 billion (~31% of total revenue). Through fiscal discipline and sound management, Botswana transformed itself from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle-income country with the Gross Domestic Product per capita recorded at 6934.86 US dollars in 2012. The GDP per Capita in Botswana is equivalent to 56 percent of the world's average.

Botswana remains largely dependent on its diamond deposits. The international economic crisis revealed Botswana's vulnerability, when the economy shrank by 5.4% in 2009 due to plummeting diamond exports. To minimize this dependency and to prepare the country for the "life after the diamonds", there is need to diversify. The government has developed a new growth paradigm based on among other things the creation of skilled workforce as can be seen in the National Development Plans (NDP9 and NDP10), the Revised National Policy on education (RNPE, 1994) and the National Human Resources Development Strategy (NHRDS, 2009). The government has also invested heavily in education and training with annual recurrent and development budget of 25% going to education resulting in an increased total number of graduates from primary and secondary education who need further training for the labour market.

However, Botswana is faced with a challenge of high unemployment rate (17.8% according to budget speech 2012), including graduates of tertiary institutions which may to a large extent be contributed significantly to "skills mismatch". Tackling the existing mismatch requires reform of the education system such that it provides enterprises with workers with relevant skills, and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. One of the goals of NDP10 matching skills with the national labour market requirements and promoting individuals' potential to advance and contribute to economic and social development. The NHRDS lays the basis for improving the processes for human resource development, with some of its key features being the relevance and quality of education and training, focus on employability and skills and creation of employment opportunities and acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience by citizens.

Another challenge facing Botswana and other developing countries is globalization pressure in their labour markets. According to the Open Society Institute (OSI,2005), Governments in a global economy need to stimulate investment, including, in most countries, foreign capital and increasingly knowledge intensive capital, which means providing a ready supply of skilled labor. This pressure has heightened the expectations from institutes of higher education to lead in creation and dissemination of relevant skills, then only will they be teaching employability. Work ethic is one of the employability skills most sort after by employers. The Global Competitiveness Report (GCR, 2010-11) noted that poor work ethic tops the list of 15 factors identified as the most problematic for doing business in Botswana. Again in the GCR 2013-2014, which positioned Botswana at position 74<sup>th</sup> out of 148 countries, 2 out of the top 4 factors identified as the most problematic factors for doing business in the country were poor work ethic in national labour force (*for the sixth consecutive year*) and inadequately educated workforce.

### **Employability & Work Ethic**

Employability of a graduate is the propensity of the graduate to exhibit attributes that employers anticipate will be necessary for the future effective functioning of their

organisation (Havey L.,1999). An attribute can also be referred to as a quality, characteristic, *attitude* or ability of a person. An attribute can include intellect, knowledge, willingness and ability to learn and continue learning, ability to find things out, willingness to take risks and show initiative, flexibility and adaptability to respond, pre-empt and ultimately lead change; and 'self-skill' such as self-motivation, self-confidence, self-management and self-promotion (Harvey, Moon and Geall, 1997). Employability can also be defined as "having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful"<sup>5</sup> (Hager and Polland, 2006, pp. 2). It may also be referred to as transferable skill, soft skill, core skills, key skills, generic skills, basic skills or cross-curricular skills which include among others communication skills, numeracy, self-confidence and self-discipline, problem-solving, analysis, interpersonal skills, knowledge and intelligence (Kelsall, Poole, and Kuhn, 1972). According to Lankard (1990), employability skills include personal image, interpersonal skills, good habits and *attitudes*. With respect to work attitudes, the concept of *work ethic* is related to the desirable characteristics for a potential employee (Custer & Claiborne, 1991; Hill, 1992). Hence tangible expression of work ethic is a necessity for high performance at work place.

Work ethic is one of the employability skills most sort after by employers (Hill,R.B. and Petty, G.C., 1995). Boardman (1994) gives an example of the one community where employers complained that they were "unable to locate employees who were reliable, drug-free, motivated, and possessing a work ethic." According to Colson & Eckerd (1991), work ethic and employability skills are listed as something needed for job success and need to be addressed by educators. Work ethic is a cultural norm that advocates being personally accountable and responsible for the work that one does and is based on a belief that work has intrinsic value (Hill,R.B. and Petty, G.C., 1995).Ethics refers to the study of whatever is appropriate, right and good for humans (Donaldson and Werhane, 1993). It is the application of moral values and codes to complex problems using a rational decision-making process (Churchill, 1982). Moral values and codes are the comprehensive and abstract principles that govern human conduct in a given situation (Buller et al., 1991). As such, ethics is concerned with how individuals apply these moral values and codes when facing an ethical dilemma.

According to the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Cultural norms are behaviour patterns that are typical of specific groups. Such behaviours are learned from parents, teachers, peers, and many others whose values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours take place in the context of their own organizational culture. Cultural norms often are so strongly ingrained in an individual's daily life that the individual may be unaware of certain behaviours. Until these behaviours are seen in the context of a different culture with different values and beliefs, the individual may have difficulty recognizing and changing them. Some norms are healthy and some are not. Some contribute to the betterment of individuals, families, and communities. Like other cultural norms, a person's adherence to or belief in the work ethic is principally influenced by socialization experiences during childhood and adolescence. Through interaction with family, peers, and significant adults, a person "learns to place a value on work behaviour as others approach him in situations demanding increasing responsibility for productivity" (Braude, 1975, p. 134). Based on praise or blame and affection or anger, a child appraises his or her performance in household chores, or later in part-time jobs, but this appraisal is based on the perspective of others. As a child matures, these attitudes toward work become internalized, and work performance is less dependent on the reactions of others. Children are also influenced by the attitudes of others toward work (Braude, 1975). If a parent demonstrates a dislike for a job or a fear of unemployment, children will tend to assimilate these attitudes. Parents who demonstrate a strong work ethic tend to impart a strong work ethic to their children.

Braude further states that socialization that occurs in the workplace is another significant factor in shaping the work attitudes. As a person enters the workplace, the perceptions and reactions of others tend to confirm or contradict the work attitudes shaped in childhood. The occupational culture, especially the influence of an "inner fraternity" of colleagues, has a significant impact on the attitudes toward work and the work ethic which form part of each person's belief system.

### **Culture and Attitude**

According to Guiso L., Sapienza P. & Zingales L. (2006), Culture is defined as those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation. Through the invisible bond, culture ties the people together. People's lifestyles and moral manifest their culture and that of their communities.

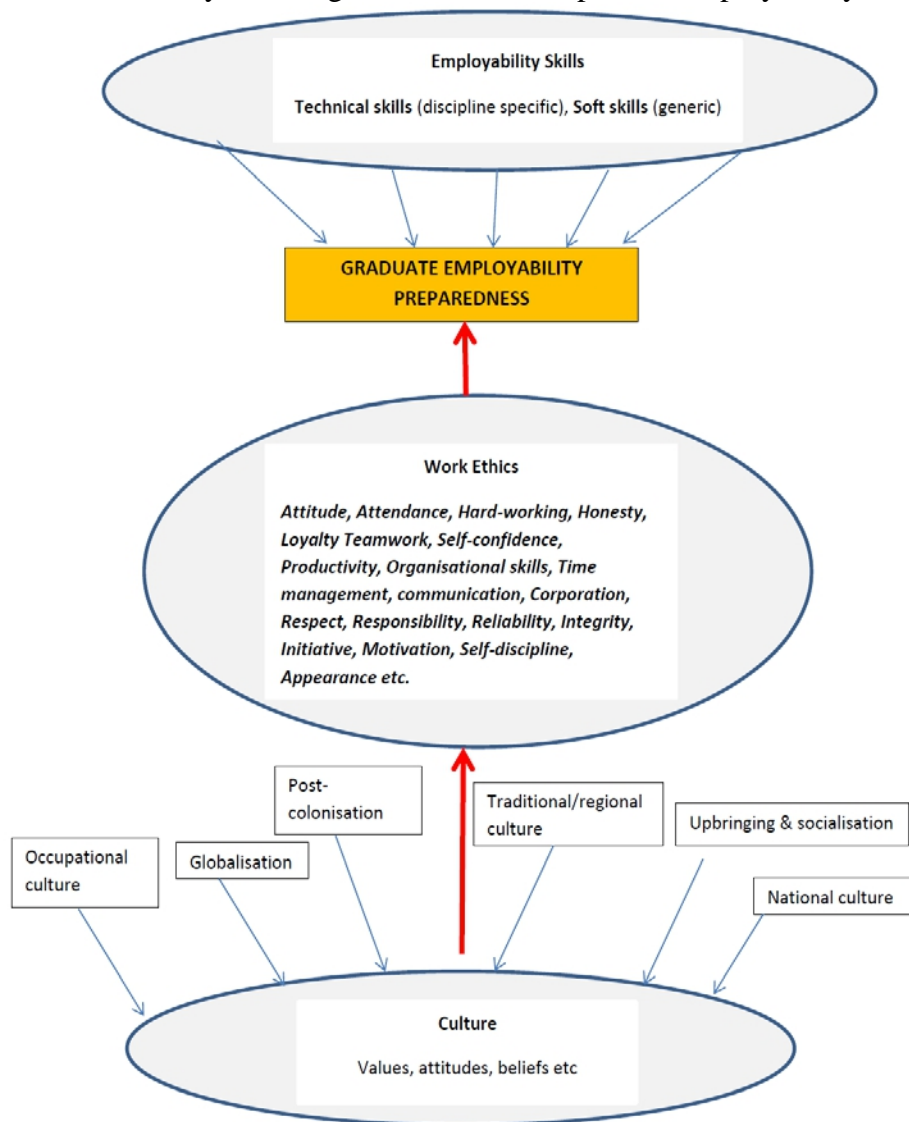
Culture constitutes 'patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups' (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 13). Culture gives an individual a unique identity. The culture of a community gives its people a character of their own. Culture shapes the personality of a community. Hofstede (1984), claims that 'people carry "mental programs" which are developed in the family in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organizations, and that these mental programs contain a component of national culture'. According to Poortinga (1992), national culture places boundaries on human behaviour by defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. National culture is 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another (Hofstede, 1980). National culture to be related to ethics because national culture creates barrier conditions for behaviour and as such should influence individual ethics. The different sets of values, beliefs, ideas, attitudes and morals that are ingrained in the national culture guide individuals in terms of what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (Vitell et al., 1993). As such, national culture should influence ethics in influencing the perceptions that some behaviours are desirable and others are undesirable. Furthermore, national culture dimensions can also create conditions whereby certain egoistic values are encouraged (Cullen et al., 2004). According to the Kartha, D.,(2012) "culture is a learned pattern of behavior, and is a way in which a person lives his life. It is an integral part of every society, and creates a feeling of belonging and togetherness among the people of that society. Culture encompasses various aspects of communication, *attitude*, etiquette, beliefs, values, customs, norms, food, art, jewelryclthing styles, etc". It can therefore be said that culture shapes individual's mindset and attitude.

Psychologists define attitudes as a learned tendency to evaluate things in a certain way Hockenbury, D., & Hockenbury, S.E. (2007). This can include evaluations of people, issues, objects or events. Such evaluations are often positive or negative, but they can also be uncertain at times. Attitudes can also be explicit and implicit. Explicit attitudes are those that we are consciously aware of and that clearly influence our behaviors and beliefs. Implicit attitudes are unconscious, but still have an effect on our beliefs and behaviors. Attitudes form directly as a result of experience. They may emerge due to direct personal experience, or they may result from observation. Social roles and social norms can have a strong influence on attitudes. Social roles relate to how people are expected to behave in a particular role or context. Social norms involve society's rules for what behaviors are considered appropriate Smith, E.R. & Mackie, D.M. (2007). Attitudes can be learned in a variety of ways like, through Classical Conditioning (an association of one event with another that results in a pattern of behaviour), Operant Conditioning (learners must make some response before their behaviour is reinforced or rewarded) and Social Learning Theory (individuals adopt their own pattern of behaviour by observing and copying or modelling the behaviour of others)

Buch K., Bartley S. (2002). While attitudes can have a powerful effect on behavior, they are not set in stone.

### Conceptual Framework

The framework has been conceptualised by the researcher based on the literature that has been reviewed. Culture is influenced by different forces, for example traditional/regional culture, upbringing socialisation, national culture, occupational culture, globalisation, and colonisation. According to Kartha, D.(2012), culture encompasses among others, attitude, beliefs and values, all of which impacts deeply on one’s attitude toward life. Work is a critical component of one’s life and ultimately this reflects one’s work ethic. For a graduate to be adequately prepared for work, they must be in possession of both technical (job-specific) skills and soft skills. Examples of critical soft skills are similar to those stipulated in the work ethic. Then only can the graduate be said to possess employability skills.



### Work Ethics in Botswana (Past & Present) & attempted solutions

According to Makgala (2013) lately Botswana have been painted as having an appallingly lax work ethic. However it is acknowledged that traditionally they worked hard, particularly when providing labour for traditional activities that did not involve monetary payment, such as weddings and funerals. Actually during the pre-colonial Botswana’s

traditional regimental system projects, such as the building of schools, churches, dams, roads and other ‘public works’ were carried out communally. Botswana took pride in the hard work and the ethos of community self-help and self-reliance that they fostered (Madisa, 1980). Contradictory Botswana are said to lack the necessary discipline to work industriously when it comes to paid work. According to Tabulawa (2006), Traditionally, Botswana are great cattle farmers and in spite of environmental constraints, dedicated arable farmers as well. It is therefore not surprising that many Botswana ‘moonlight’ at their formal places. Some simply get to the office just to hang their jackets on their chairs and leave for the cattle post and/or lands. And it isn’t that when they get to the cattle post they lie in tree shades and give orders to their herd boys. They do the hard work. These are the very same people who underperform at the office.

In the 1930 and 1940s, the British colonial administrators raised the issue of poor work ethic, which according to them was adversely affecting the administration of tribal affairs (BNARS, 1950). The work ethic problems were drunkenness, irresponsibility, neglect of duty, misappropriation of hut-tax and other tribal moneys, serious internal disputes, lack of punctuality, productivity, lack of sustained effort and a high degree of expectation and dependence on the colonial government by the people. The work ethic problem persisted even after Botswana got her independence. Daniel Kwelagobe, then the minister for public service and information, on several occasions between 1976 and 1979 ‘called for the development of a localised efficient, loyal, courteous and well-disciplined service’. He complained that there are far too many cases of public officers involved in misappropriation of funds, absence without leave, drunkenness, Lack of productivity, attributed to low morale, was manifested in a lack of punctuality and leaving work early, as well as truancy, drunkenness and resignation of qualified locals from the public service, resulting in vacant places which government had difficulty filling quickly”. According to Kwelagobe the twin issues of indiscipline and generally poor work ethic within the public service were part of a larger problem experienced by almost all sectors of the population in Botswana. In 1981 at a Botswana Civil Service Association(BCSA) annual general conference in Kanye, President Masire addressing productivity said “the blame was laid squarely on supervisors, who were accused of failing to confront their juniors when they, for example, spent too much time outside their offices. Issues of civil servants’ attitude toward their work and dependency on government were also raised. The problem of being ‘busy doing nothing except chatting to friends whilst others were busy overworked’ was raised by Professor John Turner in 1982 at a BCSA in Maun.

Botswana Government has addressed the problem of inefficiency in the workplace in different ways. Firstly in 1995 the government established the Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC) in Gaborone. BNPC’s main purpose was to address poor work ethic. Later, ‘Organization and Methods’ (O and M) with the aim of facilitating the establishment of clear goals and objectives by ministries and departments was introduced. This was soon followed the ‘Work Improvement Teams’ (WITS) programmes. Not much later was this too followed by the ‘Performance Management System’ (PMS), whose primarily purpose was to address general wastage of public resources, poor involvement of the public in decision-making and poor implementation of development plans. All these did not yield much success and in 2006, President Masire lamented that they “certainly have not solved the problem”. There has been a lot of pleading over the years by various head of state about Botswana poor work ethic and lack of self-reliance.

### **Challenges in Tertiary Educators in Botswana**

One of the goals of education is to prepare young people to participate in paid work; as employees or self-employed (Harvey L. 1999). With constant changes in the global

market, nature of work and skills, educators need to keep up with the pace in order to produce quality and relevant graduates. A consultative process of an assessment of skills development in Botswana revealed that the skills gaps do exist in a number of areas due to weaknesses in terms of training (Siphambe, 2008). Employers prefer foreign workers to local ones which could be a manifestation of lack of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness in the training system. The programme is weak in terms of practical experience, the syllabus is not flexible, and industry participation in training is very minimal making the program less relevant for the labour market. According to BOTA (2010), there is need for detailed information on skills gaps and skills shortages in order to align education and training provision with the demands of the labour market (BOTA, 2010). NDP10 also identifies the challenge of training high quality graduates with skills relevant to the country's economic and social development and ability to compete in global labour markets. Part of the RNPE strategy is aimed at: *i.* quality education and training with emphasis on equipping learners with skills to enable them to enter into self-employment and provide an opportunity for lifelong learning, *ii.* Knowledge, skills, values and attributes in a form that prepares learners for changes in the world around them, for the world of work and life-long learning, *iii.* Equitable lifelong education and training that is relevant and responsive to the rapid technological development and the changing socio-economic environment, and that produces knowledgeable, skilled enterprising and independent individuals.

## Conclusion

This research seeks to find out where culture contributes negatively to work ethic in Botswana and to identify how tertiary educators can intervene in an attempt to bridge the skills mismatch gap with regard to work ethic in preparing graduates for global competitiveness. The Research Objectives are to investigate influence of culture on work ethic in Botswana, examine globalization's impact on the industry's expectations on graduates' employability and work ethic, and give recommendations on how tertiary educators can enhance graduates preparedness on employability and work ethic. The Hypothesis of the research is that "culture in Botswana negatively influences attitude to work resulting to poor work ethic among Botswana". Due to the broadness of culture and limitations of time and finances, this research will only focus on the "up-bring socialization and occupation (workplace) socialization. Interpretive philosophy will be adopted and Interviews and questionnaires will be used as tools for data collection. Microsoft Excel functions, tables and charts will be used to analyze and present the data.

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