

DIVERSITY AND OPTIMIZATION IN NIGERIA: THE WORKPLACE INTRICACIES

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Abstract: The optimization of corporate processes in a demographically diversified enclave as Nigeria was the intent of this Paper. Despite the heightened expectations of firms in the productive sectors of the economy, not much appears to have been accomplished in Nigeria, a country with many diversely talented people with multifarious levels of ingenuity. To fill the apparent lacuna in literature and constructively make contributions to the research areas of diversity and workplace optimization, primary data was gathered via a survey tool with a scale akin to Likert's 5-point scale. Information was gathered from forty –six respondents, representing the firms established for productive purposes in two South-South states in Nigeria. The analysed data using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient at the 0.01 level of significance revealed that firms do not operate at optimal levels due to ineffective management of surface and deep-level diversity. It was suggested that managers should make it imperative that workers are absolutely unconcerned about issues of diversity as stated in this paper for maximum optimization of corporate processes and outcomes.

Keywords: behavior, diversity, equity, inclusion, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is often revered among the comity of nations due to its vast population and the enviable position it occupies as the largest economy in Africa. Nonetheless, the manufacturing sub-sector, a subset of the productive sector has performed abysmally in terms of contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The data as put forward by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicate that in the third quarter of 2022, manufacturing accounted for a paltry 2.20 per cent of GDP. There are several attributable reasons for the productive consequences of firms and the majority of the country's economic woes. However, it has been theorized that cultural disparities among workers at many contemporary businesses as well as differences in personality and other factors, may affect employee actions might contribute to failure (Eze, et al., 2022; Osho & Deji-Oyeleye, 2022). Thus, managers will immensely benefit from a comprehensive knowledge of human behavior at work if they are to maximize their employees' individual talents and productive contributions. Managers who have a realistic view of the difficulty of competing in the modern global market are more likely to attract and keep the best employees. This is because they understand the vital role their institutions play in maintaining economic growth and establishing their country's strategic standing within the international community. It is commonsensical that when hiring, the best people should be engaged. However, it is common for managers in firms in Nigeria to be challenged by the intricacies of the recruitment of persons in a diversified, multicultural and socio-religious society. Hence, it is crucial that leaders in firms understand the complexities that diversity in workplaces might bring in order to better manage its many aspects for optimum effects for success.

Given the way most companies are organized today, it stands to reason that a more diverse staff might positively affect performance and introduce new challenges. Managers in Nigeria, a country with a wide variety of people, languages, and cultures, have a critical responsibility to play in fostering an inclusive and varied work environment. If citizens in a country had equal access to resources like schools and jobs, it stands to reason that organizations' upper echelons will have a diverse group of leaders. Managers in Nigeria, a country with a population of over 220 million (United Nations, 2023) and more than half of them of working age will face the tremendous challenge of managing diversity in the workplace.

The importance of the optimization of organizational outcomes in diversified workplaces seems often overlooked by managers of productive ventures in Nigeria. Opponents of the business case for managing worker diversity often express concern that the advantages to the organization will be insufficient, temporary, or unrealized. Thus, scholars and managers with divergent perspectives appear to ignore the challenges of accommodating individuals' unique combinations of physiological and psychological characteristics, which are obvious and glaring in demographic diversity dimensions such as religion, age, physical ability, ethnicity and so on. Managers may in addition to the aforementioned, have a hard time dealing with behavioral issues such as those emanating from deeply embedded dispositions of the persons concerned that result from their varied life experiences and life perspectives. What has been discussed thus far suggests that companies with managers who understand the benefits of effectively managing their diverse workforces are more likely to achieve success.

In light of Nigeria's rich cultural diversity, several studies have looked at different facets of diversity in the workplace to collect data on the issues that arise from it. Yet, researchers investigating process optimization indicators often look into areas like marketing, finance and accountancy (Adegboegun & Igbekoyi, 2022; Amahalu, et al., 2023; Kabara, et al., 2022). Much is still left to be done in terms of theoretical and practical initiatives to boost process optimization and rigorously address diversity in workplaces while drawing attention to issues of equity and inclusion. The significant findings of this work will be immensely beneficial to managers and policymakers for obtaining optimum performance.

II. LITERATURE/ THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This work grew a lot of ideas from the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978). The social identity theory suggests that being a part of a group can have effects on an individual's conduct inside the in-group to the detriment of those in the out-group. The theory focuses on a number of issues, including the impact of social settings on individual behaviour, the existence of many identities, and individual variation in the extent a person affiliates with certain groups (Bertin, et al., 2022).

When it comes to diversity at work, strong group identification is an excellent predictor of whether or not discrimination will occur. People feel superior and entitled because of their membership in certain groups. Mustapha (2005) believes that "Nigerians' ethnolinguistic and regional identities remain strong and that public, private and civil society workgroup members have demonstrated considerable ethnic bias in recent years. Thomas and Ometere (2022) believe that strong democratic structures will better foster harmony and cordiality among religious and ethnic groups. Atoi, et al., (2019) noted that the consciousness of citizens to religion and ethno-regional attachments are based on the inference drawn from the antecedents of structures that encourage inequity and human rights violation. People tend to take on a variety of identifiers during the course of their lives. A person's gender, religion, race, age, background, and employment are only some of the identifiers they may adorn at any one time. In Nigeria, due to the country's complex multifarious identifiers and varying "politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability, competing groups tend to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies, with individuals possessing crisscrossing and recursive identities, the most prominent of which appear to be ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic" ones (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Hence, people in a community may choose to identify as religious rather than ethnic, depending on the size and intensity of the conflict or the level of ambiguity. The way individuals evaluate themselves and others can be made clearer by the social identity theory. To protect their social identities, members of a group are more likely to have a favorable bias toward others who appear to share those identities with them. Tajfel and Turner (2004) focused on individual identity, categorization and inter-group dynamics all of which have implications for workplace behavior.

A. DIVERSITY

The discourse of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has been prominently featured in academia and in industry. A diverse workforce is one that comprises people with different perspectives, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Diversity has been broadly seen as “real or perceived physical or socio-cultural differences attributed to people and the representation of these differences in organizations” (Arsel, et al., 2022). These differences are looked at in terms of demographic compositions which are visible such as gender, race/ethnicity, religion or age. These are sometimes called surface-level diversity or demographic diversity (Egitim, 2022; Roberson, 2019; Turnbull, 2023). Studies have also looked at another compositional dimension of diversity which takes cognizance of an individual’s attitudes, dispositions and other latent characteristics which are referred to as deep-level diversity (Leroy, et al., 2022; Mathieu, et al., 2019; Nkomo, et al., 2019). It is not enough to have knowledge of the diversity dimensions. Managers should be well grounded in the intricacies of how of these forms of diversity could adversely affect work. Tajfel and Turner (2004) have discussed extensively on the biases of categorization of persons within workplaces. As far as persons do not feel free to work and interact or feel discriminated against due to their levels of diversity, they are unlikely to bring out the best in them. The management of diversity in workplace becomes very crucial.

Managers that are skilled in workforce diversity management may increase productivity by tapping into employees' commonalities and differences across demographics such as age, culture, physical ability and special ability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and personality. Those who value intellectual diversity tend to see more in common with their coworkers than to differentiate themselves, at least when it comes to less concrete qualities (Nguyen, et al., 2022).

All elements of diversity management in organizations should explore avenues that will consider leadership and decision-making inclusivity that will disabuse the minds of employees' of any iota of organizational injustice. This is in line with the thoughts of Hoang, et al. (2022) who believe that firms' programmes and policies should promote organizational justice by creating workgroups that are heterogeneous. It would appear that group situations are more sensitive to the nuances of variety. Persons in heterogeneous teams possess a wide variety of abilities, both natural and learned. Management that takes diversity into account actively seeks out and implements methods to increase engagement from a broad cross-section of the workforce (Yang, et al., 2022). In work situations, members may tend to rely on one another to accomplish tasks. Studies in both organizational and laboratory settings have revealed that diversity dramatically affects the experiences of group members (Leroy, et al., 2022; Patrício, & Franco, 2022).

Diversity management issues are commonplace in firms. Thus, it becomes highly expedient to identify and address them without delay. Prejudice and discrimination tend to flourish in settings with high levels of cultural variety. Corporate policies should be able to strengthen structures within the firms that will address the concerns of worried workers, who feel that they will be better protected by the stipulated policies and structural guidelines. For a firm to adduce that workforce diversity has been properly managed, the employees must be able to say with confidence that issues of their diversity do make them worried at the workplace but rather that such diversities aid in the success of their firms and they enjoy high levels of job satisfaction.

B. PROCESS OPTIMIZATION

The optimization of organizational processes is aimed at increasing efficiency and coming out with the best output for the organization while reducing wastage in course of the activities. There is always a good rationale for the formation of organizations, and they usually have some sort of long-term goal that they work toward. The success of an organization is measured by how successfully it achieves its objectives (Hayat, et al., 2022; Ika & Pinto, 2022). Firms that desire to survive in a hyper-competitive business environment will always check to see if it is accomplishing the right goals as an optimization strategy. The success of a company depends on how well it uses the resources at its disposal to produce desirable outcomes and realize its stated objectives. El Khatib, et al. (2022) opine that areas of optimization could include firms' leadership, the extent of interpersonal cooperation as well as firms' processes to continuously meet the expectations of customers. Optimization could affect firms' future projections and must cover every facet of work including finance, manufacturing, marketing, management, and overall productive activities (Galli, 2022). The achievement of optimum level performance in firms will depend on the attitude, aptitude and the state of mind of persons who work for the firms. If there are inter-personal bickering and infighting, lack of trust and cold wars among workers, the quest for optimization

will be highly herculean. The urge for continuous improvement forces many firms to view process optimization as an ongoing process. Key performance data, such as sales compared to objectives, number of items on backorder, or percentage of customer support calls resolved within specific time periods, can be monitored through the use of artificial intelligence and other technologically monitored tools (Rathore, 2023). Process optimization is viewed in this work as how well an organization meets its goals in terms of output, profit, personnel retention, and creativity.

III. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey approach was used to examine the primary data. The method of secondary data collection was similar to that of desk research. It was anticipated that at least one manager with promotion potential or experience in the firm would fill out the survey, thus questionnaires were distributed to each company in the sample in order to obtain primary data. Conversations were had at length outside in the fresh air. Further data on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and level of firms' optimization was gleaned through file reports and annual reports. This investigation focused exclusively on factories in the south-south region of Nigeria. The goal of this study is to choose a statistically valid sample size among the registered firms. Using the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of sixty-six was found. The reliability of the study was ensured by measuring the variables on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the survey instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients generated in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences which had alpha values of 0.7 or above. The management of diversity was the degree to which employees were concerned about the diversity level. In this study, we operationally defined process optimization as the extent to which organizations are able to meet expectations in terms of output, profit, personnel retention, and creativity. The contextual data for the study were analyzed using correlations based on the Spearman Rank Order coefficients.

IV. RESULTS/ FINDINGS

The results revealed that the diversity dimensions were negatively correlated with the measures of process optimization of the firms. The results showed productive output was (-0.716, $P < 0.01$). Profitability, personnel retention, and creativity had the following results at -0.756, -0.711 and -0.728 respectively at $P < 0.01$. This implies that the more issues employees had with their diversity dimensions the less the productive output, the fewer firm's profitability, and the less their ability to retain employees as well as their creativity level.

V. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Diversity issues are ubiquitous in firms in Nigeria. These issues have not been properly managed and are adversely affecting the bottom line. The apparent sub-optimal levels at which many firms are operating will stifle success. To address diversity matters firms should enact policies that are based on fairness and justice rather than on creating a sense of inequality or highlighting differences among workers. Employees at the managerial level should set an example and show strong dedication to diversity management intervention measures, and all workers should be required to undergo diversity training.

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