RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

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Abstract

Achieving sustainable development requires an understanding of a committed workforce. In this current millennium, the importance of workforce diversity in the quest for an organization to have a competitive edge cannot be overemphasized. This study, therefore, examines the relationship between workforce diversity and employee commitment. Specifically, to understand if any positive link exists between age diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity and the level of employee commitment. Employing a cross-sectional survey design and simple random sampling technique; a total of 145 responses were elicited from employees with the aid of a questionnaire. While correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed to analyze the data collected. The result revealed a significant positive link between age diversity and employee commitment; a significant association between gender diversity and employee commitment; and a positive link between ethnic diversity and employee commitment. The study concludes that workforce diversity has implication for employee commitment. The study recommends that managers should endeavour to take the issue of workforce diversity serious and pay prompt attention to managing diversity. Sensitize employees on the importance and advantage of workforce diversity.

Keywords: *Workforce diversity, gender diversity, age diversity, ethnic diversity, employee commitment*

INTRODUCTION

Workforce diversity has become a primary concern for both profit and non-profit organizations therefore the need to understand workforce diversity is essential for sustainable economic development (Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2019; Őzgür, 2016). In this 21st century, with the rapid increase in globalization, organizations require employees from different background, culture, with diverse skills (Beugelsdijk, Klasing, & Milionis, 2019; Cho, Kim, Mor Barak, 2017). Workforce diversity enables organizations to access a wider variety

of talents which in turn assist organizations in adapting to changes in the business environs; thus helping respond better to the changing demands of the global market place and ultimately increases organization's profit (Armache, 2013). Amid a diversifying and globalizing economy, there is a trend of global organizations acknowledging the importance of building a diversity climate that encourages learning from others and capturing the advantages of diverse perspectives (Cho et al., 2017: Oduro, Akpabot, Akakpo, & Gyasi, 2019). Consequently, it is important for any organization to accord due priority to workforce diversity positively in order to encourage a committed workforce (Bano, Khan, Habibullah & Butt, 2013).

Employee commitment has been viewed by scholars as the extent to which employees are involved in their job (Meyer, Morin, & Vandenberghe 2015). According to Allen and Meyer (1997) employee commitment is a multidimensional construct consisting of three levels of commitment, namely affective, normative and continuance commitment which involves employee desire to stay with the organization, obligation to stay and the cost if the employee decides to leave the organization (Meyer et al., 2015)

However, the current research views commitment as a one-dimensional construct in line with Mowday, Poter and Steers, (1982). To them, employee commitment is "the relative of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, et al., 1982, p.27). Certain organizational outcomes such as commitment is critical for organizations today and the perception of employees on how the organization handles workforce diversity may elicit a positive or negative response from employees (Bano, et al., 2013). The level of commitment differs in both develop and developing nations, just like the level of workforce diversity.

According to Adagba and Salfu (2017), a nation such as Nigeria is currently faced with the problem of workforce diversity due to its population. Ranging from the "good the bad and the ugly", Nigeria has a pool from which public and private sector managers can recruit employees from and apply this diversity to the advantage of the organization and the nation (George, Yusuff & Cornelius, 2017). Also, understanding how employees interact with each other and how this impact on their level of commitment remains an interesting issue of research (Ugwuzor, 2011). Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that workforce diversity can either be viewed as a deep-level or surface-level in line with (Cho et al., 2017).

In view of the above, the objective of this research study is to examine how surface-level workforce diversity (age diversity, gender diversity and ethnic diversity) influences employee commitment.

Statement of the Problem

With globalization, the need for a diverse workforce is imperative if properly managed. Surface-level diversity has the potentials of ensuring that organizations achieve its objective (Weber, Sadiri & Gentry, 2018). Based on anecdotal evidence and a preliminary

investigation by the researchers, there are clues suggesting that employees are not committed to their work. It is important that managers note that the level of employee commitment may not be achieved if appropriate workforce diversity practices are not applied with sound conducive work environments. In view of the foregoing, organizations are faced with varying challenges of managing the diverse nature of its workforce which is a fundamental problem. And this challenge leads to a conflict of interest in policies and practices implementations (Akinnusi, Sonubi, & Oyewunmi, 2017).

Arguably, even when some organizations train their employees when recruited it does not stop these employees from going against certain principles when it comes to diversity. In addition, when employees find themselves in an environment which compels them to work with colleagues as team members, diversity may be an issue if not properly managed. It is, therefore, imperative that management of organizations, who to some extent lacks the required knowledge and skill on how well to effectively managed diversity, needs to, and create an inclusive environment. In view of the above, this research study intends to bridge the gap in knowledge on workforce diversity and employees' commitment which will be of utmost importance to the understudy organization, the government, other organizations, employees including the society at large.

Theoretical Framework

Social identity theory and the similarity-attraction theory were employed for the study. However, this study is underpinned by the similarity-attraction theory. The social identity theory which is also referred to as categorization theory was postulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 (Cho et al., 2017). The major point of this theory is that individuals define their self-identity based on the group they belong to (Gazi, 2014). However, despite the relevance of this theory, critics have explained that the theory does not clearly examine employees past attitudes and thereby making it difficult to predict how they are expected to behave in the future (David, 2015). Furthermore (Philip, 2018) opines that the theory does not take into consideration history and the ways of life of people and how this way of life may impact negatively on organizational outcomes such the commitment level. Though, diversity in the work environment stems from the fact that employees emanate from a social group with diverse ways of life, giving them their own identity; if properly managed it becomes an advantage for the organization (Cho et al., 2017)

In the similarity-attraction paradigm, researchers agreed that it was postulated and formalized in research since the mid-1900s. In the research studies conducted, individuals are most attracted to those who share identical behavioural pattern and traits (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). In addition, people who share the same attitudes such as home, family and religious beliefs amongst others are more likely to come together and share similar thoughts than those who do not have the same belief system. Mercy (2012) posited that the theory is nothing less than the more people like me, the happier I am. Scholars have

criticized this theory on the bases that there is no reason for the notion that attitude similarity leads to interpersonal attraction (Sunafrank, 1992). He buttressed this by saying that the "cause-and-effect" relationship between similarity and attraction does not exist. Also, some researchers believed that similarity-attraction theory doesn't apply to all social situations and that people that share similar adverse attributes may not like themselves. From the foregoing, the two theories are imperative to this study because they addressed the issue of workforce diversity on employee's commitment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee commitment

In organizational studies, the commitment of employees have become one of the most discussed, studied and popular attitude exhibited by employees in the cause of performing their jobs (Peace & Mohammed, 2014). This is so because organizations now require committed employee to be able to compete and sustain in the current business environment (Akintayo, 2010). In the opinion of Zheng, Sharan and Wei (2010) employees' commitment is an employees' attitude towards the organization. While Meyer and Allen (1997) opine this attitude has three psychological impacts on employees, these are the will to stay, obligation to stay or for economic reasons. This concept is viewed as a unidimensional concept (Mowday et al., 1982) and a multidimensional concept (Meyer & Allen 1997), consisting of normative, affective and continuance level of commitment (Armstrong, 2016)

Workforce Diversity

Diversity in itself has different strands one of which is workforce diversity. Cho et al. (2017) opine that workforce diversity has significant implication for organizations, regardless of its less of operation and ownership. It refers to the uniqueness individual bring to the organization in terms of what they pose that the impact positively on the organizations' wellbeing and the employees (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Arguably, workforce diversity may become a serious issue for an organization, even a nation if not well managed (George et al., 2017). Furthermore, workforce diversity if well managed will help strengthen an organization strategically, helping to build a competitive edge against competitors (Scott & Sims 2016). Gupta (2013) noted that for the past twenty years, the increasing workforce diversity has become a subject of serious discourse among scholars, pointing out that organizations will only achieve its desired goals if they can embrace and encourage workforce diversity. However, Doris, Mary and George (2016) are of the opinions that workforce diversity can also generate conflicts amongst employees if not properly managed.

Age diversity

Age diversity has its advantage and challenges for organizations, it gives an organization a competitive edge as well as the benefits accrue from diversity (Adagba & Salifu, 2017). According to Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2013) age diversity affects all

organization as each age group has its uniqueness and advantage which it brings into the organization. Based on this, scholars have argued that it has become a major issue in the life of organizations and if not well understood and managed it poses a serious challenge for the organization (Kunze et al., 2011). Different ages with its peculiarity, for example, the young employees are energetic and willing adapt to various changes as it comes to the organization, unlike the older employees (Doris, et al., 2016).

Gender Diversity

Hannah (2018) posited that employees differ in their actions and attitude, so also do female and males differ in their action in the work environment. Gender diversity is also an important factor which impedes on the level of commitment by employees either as an individual or as a group. She "emphasized that gender diversities are visible in prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination" According to Powell (2011) gender diversity brings certain expectation from people, giving the culture and social believes. However, the combination of male and females in organizational setting today gives certain advantages, in terms of the idea, skill and the value they add to the organization Powell (2011).

Research by scholars has tilted more to the fact that any group or team without diversity cannot outperform teams or group with gender diversity if well managed, owing to the advantages of gender diversity (Hannah, 2018) though other scholars are of the view that some organization prefer to give certain job positions the male rather than female for respect and status for males. In view of this, the majority of such organizations prefer to hire male employees compared to female employees (Leonard & Levine, 2003). Regardless of whichever continuum one stands, it is imperative that organizations understand and takes advantage of gender diversity.

Ethnic Diversity

The need for synergy from employees from diverse background has become a topical issue for organizations survival today, as this has an advantage for both the organizations and the employees (Cho et al., 2017). Ethnicity refers to the coming together of people with a similar thought, ways of life and identity, which makes them different from other groups of people (Doris et al., 2016). Ethnicity diversity simply mean diversity in language, religions, races, cultures and backgrounds and with this nature of diversity they come together to work in an organization. This, however, has its merit and demerit for organizations if not properly managed, because diversity brings about different ideologies and issues (George et al., 2017). Furthermore, people tend to favour those who are of the same ethnic backgrounds more than the others, which is a major drawback of ethnic diversity.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emiko and Eunmi (2009) in their research paper posited that the management of diversity has a significant influence on the commitment level of employees, and this relationship was mediated by procedural justice. This became imperative because of the nature and importance of diversity management even in non-diverse organizations.

Muhammad, Habibullah and Naveed (2013) argued in their research study that with globalization if work diversity is properly managed then employee commitment and improvement in the performance of the organization is guaranteed. For the reason, that workforce diversity and employee's commitment in the context of globalization has attained significant attention in both research and practice.

Sang (2016) observed in her research project that over the years, it has been demonstrated that workplace diversity is important to organizations. Her research study results show that diversity management practices had a significant influence on employee's commitment in the commercial banking sector, the study also established a significant positive association between workforce diversity and the levels of commitment. Mohammad (2014) also found diversity management influenced the level of commitment.

Also, Ibrahim, Yakubu and Baba (2016) found surface-level diversity is a significant factor impacting on the management of employees; work diversity is a vital tool that can be employed to enhance employee commitment. Also, in the research study conducted by Aminu, Ken and Rhoda (2012), they opined that based on research findings, workforce diversity as a tool may lead to positive or negative work outcomes if not well managed. Olori and Comfort (2017) posited that there's an inverse significant relationship amongst workplace discrimination dimensions and employee commitment measures.

Within the Nigeria context, Adagba and Salifu (2017) found that organization till today still recruit employees base on ethnicity. The finding also revealed that this practice has been further encouraged by the political class and has continued to be a major challenge for human resource managers, the organization and the nation as a whole. Similarly, George et al (2017) found that the "Federal Character Principle" has been more of a curse than a blessing when it comes to the issues of managing diversity in Nigeria organizations today. In a study conducted by Cho et al, (2017) surface and deep level workforce diversity remains a crucial antecedence for the wellbeing of organizations.

From the above, the results and findings from the existing empirical studies on the subject matter, a lot of research studies have not been done on workforce diversity and employees commitment both in other parts of the world and Nigeria. Nigeria in which has a highly homogenous workforce with different cultural diversity has continued to be a challenge which requires further investigation. In line with George et al. (2017), eluded the need to expand the literature by empirical investigating issues on diversity management in organizations. Also, Cho et al. (2017) suggested the need for further investigation on the characteristics of employees and the organization. In view of this study identifies this, and attempts to bridge the gap by contributing to the literature on surface workforce diversity and employees commitment. Since, research studies have been done majorly on workforce diversity and employees' performance, productivity, retention, moral engagement, organizational growth.

Based on the review:

H₁: Age diversity has no significant relationship with employee commitment.

H₂: Gender diversity has no significant relationship with employee commitment.

H₃: Ethnic diversity has no significant relationship with employee commitment

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research for the study. The study population consisted of employees of one of the largest leasing company in Nigeria with a diverse workforce, with a population size of 4200 employees. The study employed Yamane (1967) sample size determination technique to generate a sample size of 268 respondents employing simple random sampling technique. A questionnaire was used to elicit information from the study respondents, out of which 186 were retrieved, 145 found usable.

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with the socio-demographic information of the respondents, the second part dealt with questions on the study variables which were adapted for the literature. A pilot study was conducted with 25 employees without replacement, to ascertain the reliability of the measuring instruments for the study. Employee commitment had a reliability measure of 0.73, age diversity 0.77, gender diversity .74 and ethnic diversity 0.71, all above the recommended threshold according to Nually (1976). The statistical analysis was done with the aid descriptive and inferential statistics, correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed to analyze the study hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics

Variables	Valid Label	Respondents (%)	Total (%)
Age	Below 21 years	31 (21.4)	
	21 – 30 years	48 (33.1)	
	31 - 40 years	49 (33.8)	
	Above 40 years	17 (11.7)	
Gender	Male	57 (39.3)	
	Female	88 (60.7)	
Ethnicity	Yoruba	65 (44.8)	
	Hausa	22 (15.2)	
	Igbo	58 (40.0)	
Education Qualification	O'Level	17 (11.7)	
	B.Sc./HND	50 (34.5	
	M.Sc./MBA	53 (36.6)	145 (100)
	Others	15 (10.3)	

	Graduate Trainee	29 (20.0)
	Junior Staff	64 (44.1)
Staff Status	Senior Staff	29 (20.0)
	Assistant manager	16 (11.0)
	Senior Manager	7 (4.8)
	Less than 1 year	26 (17.9)
Length of Service	1 – 2 years	7 (4.8)
	3 – 5 years	30 (20.7)
	6 – 10 years	17 (11.7)
	Above 10 years	65 (44.8)

Field Survey, 2018

The result from the table shows the socio-demographics of the respondents. 21.4% of the respondents are below 21 years, 33.1% of the respondents are 21- 30 years, 33.8% of the respondents are between 31 – 40 years and 11.7% of the respondents are above 40 years. This means that most of the respondents are 21 – 40 years of age. Also, 39.9% were male while 60.7% were female implying that the majority involved in the research work were female. Also, the result of the ethics of the respondents revealed that 40.0% of the respondents are Igbos, while 44.8% of the respondents are Yoruba, and 15.2% of the respondents are Hausas. This shows that this research work covers the three major tribes in Nigeria. The educational qualification of the respondents showed that 11.7% of the respondents have O'level, 51.7% of the respondents have B.Sc./HND, and 36.6% of the respondents have M.Sc./MBA. Therefore the majority of the respondents have a first degree. 20.0% are graduate trainees, 44.1% of the respondents are junior staff, 20.0% of the respondents are senior staff, 11.0% of the respondents are assistant managers and 4.8% of the respondents are senior managers. Therefore, the majority of the respondents are junior staff. Finally 17.9% of the respondents have spent less than 1 year, 44.8% of the respondents have spent between 1 – 2 years, 20.7% of the respondents have spent 3 - 5 years, also 11.7% of the respondents have spent 6 – 10 years and 4.8% of the respondents have spent above 10 years.

Table 2: Correlation Table

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1	EC	1			
2	AD	.407*	1		
3	GD	.347**	-.084	1	
4	ED	.496*	.352**	.715**	1

*Correlation is significant (p<.05), **Correlation is significant (p <.01)*
Key: *EC*: Employee commitment; *AD*: Age Diversity; *GD*: Gender diversity; *ED*: Ethical diversity

Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to test each of the hypotheses. The findings show age diversity had a significant relationship with employee commitment (r =.407). Furthermore, gender diversity had a significant relationship with employee commitment (r = .347**). Also, ethnicity diversity had a significant relationship with employee commitment (.496*).

Furthermore, a multiple regression analysis of the study variables was done and the output presented in table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of the Study Variables

Variables	Coefficient	t-value
Age diversity	.461	1.074*
Gender diversity	.284	.668*
Ethnic diversity	.551	4.002*
Constant	20.955	
R = 0.505	R^2 = .255	
F = 11.725		
Prob (F-statistic) = 0.05		

Dependent Variable: Employee Commitment

The result of the multiple regression shows how surface-level diversity employed for this study (age, gender and ethnic) independently and jointly predicts the commitment level of employees. The R-value of the model (.505) shows the joint correlation between the independent variables and employee commitment. The R2 value, which is the .255 indicating that 25.5% of the variation in employee commitment is as a result of the independent variable employed by the study. However, the remaining 74.5% are outside the variables of the study. In terms of contribution to the model; ethnic diversity made the highest contribution and also a unique statistical contribution to the equation, followed by gender diversity and then age diversity.

DISCUSSION

The study objective was to examine how workforce diversity impacts on employee commitment. The result shows that majority of the respondents were female, the majority had a first degree, a majority of the respondents were between the ages of 21 – 40 years and they cut across the three ethnicities in Nigeria, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa.

Three hypotheses were stated and the result of hypothesis one showed age diversity had a significant impact on employee commitment. The finding supports the findings of Gelner and Veen (2013), who found age diversity to be a fundamental factor affecting the input of employees of an organization. According to Glener and Veen, (2013), employees differ in their age group with varying skills and capabilities, which organizations can employ to their advantages.

Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between gender diversity and employee commitment. This finding is in line with Rao and Bagali (2014) who found in their study of IT firms in India, that gender diversity is important for managing diversity in an

organization. For management of organizations, it is an important variable for the management of workforce diversity and if not well managed may have a negative consequence for the organization in the long-run (Cho, et al., 2017). Furthermore, the literature supports the fact that even organizations with gender-diverse teams achieve a better result than organizations that do not (Hannah, 2018). The result also showed ethnic diversity had a significant relationship with employee commitment. This finding corroborates the finding of Adagba and Salifu (2017), where they posited that Nigeria is a county with diverse culture with various traditions and ethnicities, therefore the role of ethnic diversity cannot be taken for granted. Organizations need to understand that in line with the similarity-attraction theory, employees tend to associate more with people whom they believe share similar ideology and this has serious consequence for the organization.

CONCLUSION

The study of workplace diversity has constantly become a topic of importance among organizations, scholars and even practitioners. Therefore, as part of contributing to existing literature the study showed how workforce diversity impacts on the level of commitment among employees. The findings of this study have also revealed the importance and implication of workforce diversity for the organization. It is noteworthy that sustaining the development of the millennium goals for Africa requires effective and efficient management of workforce diversity. According to George et al. (2017), no organization in the world can strive without its employees and these employees are from diverse backgrounds. It, therefore, becomes important that understanding and paying adequate attention to the level of commitment among employees requires proper management of diversity. There is a fundamental need for managers to be mindful and create a healthy work environment for its employees in line with workplace diversity (Jaiswal et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2018). In addition, organizations need to have a better perception of the advantage of workplace diversity especially ethnic diversity, because having a pool of employees from various background has a serious advantage for the organization (Cho et al., 2017).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, recommends that organizations should endeavour to:

1. Sensitize its workforce on the importance of workforce diversity

2. Not only to communicate the importance of workplace diversity to the employee but how well diversity can sustain and enhance the wellbeing of the employees and the organization.

3. With globalization, diversity has become a phenomenon that organizations have gradually embraced as a strategic tool for enhancing their survival and growth. Therefore organizations and policymakers are expected to embrace this strategic toll as well.

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