

# **The Dynamics Of Managing Workforce Diversity In The Global Economy: A Reflection Of Practices In Nigerian Companies**

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## **Abstract**

With increased globalization, workforce diversity management practices have emerged as an important issues for fueling changes in workplace across the global economy, Nigeria case is not an exception. Workforce diversity is defined as firms ability to give chances to and utilize resources of people from diverse cultures. This study therefore examines the workforce diversity management practices with respect to listed companies in Nigeria. The study triggers the need for these companies to pay attention to workforce diversity management as a potential competitive resource. The study noted that the existing studies in diversity have been done in the developed economies and these may not represent the situations in Nigerian companies. The respondents selected for this study consisted of employees from five listed companies located in Lagos State, Nigeria and convenience sampling techniques were adopted to select the sample size. To achieve some degree of representativeness, a moderately large sample size of 150 respondents were used for the study and only 135 (90%) of the respondents correctly filled the questionnaire and returned back. The reliability of the scales was tested using cronbach's alpha and the construct validity was ensured while the content validity was established through review of a panel of five human resource professionals from different companies. The data collected was analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. From the study, we found that workforce diversity enhances heterogeneity of human resources and if effectively utilized could serve as competitive weapon.

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**Keywords:** Workforce Diversity Management Practices in Nigerian Companies

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## **INTRODUCTION**

With an increased globalization, workforce diversity has emerged as an important issue for diversified companies. These companies need to pay more attention to diversity management as a potential competitive resources. Most of the existing studies in diversity have been done in the developed economies, these may not represent the situations of listed companies in Nigeria. Workforce diversity is referred as the ability to give chances to and utilize resources of people from diverse cultures, where culture could mean nationality, ethnic group or gender. These perceptions affect individual interactions. Owing to the increasing workforce diversity, many organizations have come to acknowledge the fact that diverse workforce results in innovative ideas and higher overall organizational efficiency and productivity.

The workforce diversity has gained momentum because of the pressures on business that become internationally competitive, the changing labour force composition, growing awareness of the importance of human resource management and a backlash created by perceptions of special treatment for woman and ethnic

minorities. There is a wide recognition of the value of workforce diversity. Research by the Australian Centre for International Business (ACIB) indicates that diversity improves the quality of management decisions and provides innovative ideas and superior solutions to Organizational Problems (ACIB, 2000). McLead et al (1996) and Wilson et al (1999) found that diverse workforce has a better quality solution to brainstorming tasks, displays more cooperative behavior relative to homogenous groups, raise organizational efficiency, effectiveness and profitability. In addition to the full utilization of the skills and potential of all employees, managing diversity effectively contribute to organizational success. Research has suggested that managers should actively manage and value diversity and that if designed and implemented properly, effective diversity management could support key organizational development. As storey (1999) noted, the key to diversity management hinges on strategic thinking and people oriented policies. Kossek et al (2005) acknowledges the reality that people differ in many ways, visible or invisible, mentioned that

multiculturalism has been the most important dimension of diversity in western countries.

Although researchers have examined several aspects of diversity, no comprehensive model exists. In this study, we reviewed the literature on workforce diversity practices and develop a conceptual framework which might assist Nigerian Listed Companies develop human resource management strategies and policies to manage diversity effectively. The framework would help other researchers identify key areas for future research and guide practitioners to formulate and implement diversity appropriately. This study is unique because it presents empirical evidence testing whether increasing workforce diversity is associated with improved listed companies performance in Nigeria.

#### **Statement of Research Problem:**

In order to survive in a competitive global economy, the Nigerian Listed Companies need to be able to manage and utilize its diverse workforce diversity effectively. Alserhan et al (2010) noted that managing diversity in the workplace should be a part of the culture of the entire organization. Also, Cox (1994) mentioned that organizations that promote and achieve diverse workplace attract and retain quality employees and increase customer loyalty. This study probe that the failure to manage diversity in terms of race, gender, level of education, ethnic differences and others constitute the major problem for this study. The challenges that companies face in promoting teamwork with employees from diverse cultural background shows that there are much to be done in terms of improvement of workforce diversity. This study is of the view that managing workforce diversity should be the concern of every organizations.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to examine the utilization and perceptions of workforce diversity in the Nigerian Listed Companies operating in the global environment. Other specific objectives includes:

- Identify frequently encountered barriers for accepting workforce diversity.
- Find the important strategies to enhance workforce diversity.
- Find out ways to improve awareness about workforce diversity.

#### **Statement of Hypothesis**

Based on the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. Ho: There is a significant difference in the performance of employees on the basis of educational qualifications.

2. Ho: Workforce diversity have an inverted u-shaped relationship with Listed Companies performance.

#### **Significance of the Study**

On completion of this study, it might be of great significance in offering guidelines to address the challenges of workforce diversity and ultimately enhance employees' performance. The study might assist the managers by expanding the literature in the management of workforce diversity.

Furthermore, it might enable practicing Human Resource managers to remain relevant amidst the challenges of workforce diversity. To many Researchers it might pose a challenge in the proactive in the search for solutions. The study might be beneficial to the management of Listed Companies in Nigeria by improving the benefits from unity in diversity, be in terms of knowledge, culture and gender among others.

In essence, this study identified that a culture of inclusiveness are required for the benefits accruing from diversity to be truly realized, with the notion that the firm's competitiveness depends on its human talent, skills, education and productivity of its workforce.

#### **Scope of the Study**

The study covered selected Listed Companies located in Lagos State Nigeria. The study tackled areas of workforce diversity effects on employees performance and how workforce diversity can be managed, so as to maximize the positive outcomes and minimize the negative outcomes. There was some resistance from some of the respondents to participate in the study and some failed to return back the questionnaire. In addition, some managers had no time for filling the questionnaire due to their tight schedule. All these were taken into consideration and alternative measures were taken to come-up with successful result.

#### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Workforce diversity in terms of culture, globalization, multi-generation are fueling changes in workplace across the global economy. Nigerian Listed companies case not an exception. Globalization leads to diversified workforce which in-turn creates divergence among employees in terms of thinking patterns, norms, values and religion. Nowadays, we have mix of young and aged people in workplace and usually have conflicting aims, ideals, requirements and experiences which at times lead to misunderstanding. Ellis et al (1993) pointed out that when people from different cultural backgrounds become part of a single workplace, they tend to demonstrate different values and behaviours. In such a scenario, irrespective of the fact that they work together, workforce diversity

management becomes one of the top agenda for managers. Key emphasis of manager is how to handle the diversification of workforce and safeguard the interest of employees without discrimination. As noted by Jain et al (1996):

“... All those organizations who attach high value to manage diversity are more successful and forward looking.”

There is a wide recognition of the value of workforce diversity. Research by the Australian Centre for International Business (ACIB) indicates that diversity improves the quality of management decisions and provides innovative ideas and superior solutions to organization problems (ACIB 2000).

Greenberg (2004) noted that for an organization to succeed, its strategies should consist of managing change, establishment of appropriate diversity management policies and procedures and target diversity related competencies. The desired outcomes for this include attracting and developing the best employees which give the organization a competitive edge to generate greater profits that support job security.

Carrel (2006) pointed out that due to the fact that employees understand how these outcomes are desirable, they should support the organization's efforts at managing diversity and embrace culture that supports diversity, but narrated that the major challenges include communication gap, resistance to change and implementation of diversity in the workplace. D'Nelto and Sohal (1999) cited challenges from workforce diversity as meeting the requirements of strategic plan that include a number of different strategies aim at enhancing diversity and promoting the productivity and effectiveness of the organization. At the same time, Jackson et al (1995) cited that human resource managers are faced with the challenges of convincing their senior management that diversity programs are beneficial to the organization. According to Morrison (1992), managing diversity involves leveraging and using the cultural differences in people's skills, ideas and creativity to contribute to a common goal and doing it in a way that gives the organization a competitive edge. Fernandez (1993) argued that good workforce diversity practices in the areas of human resources are to enhance employees and organizational performance. This is because managing diversity involves leveraging and using the cultural differences in people's skills, ideas and creativity to contribute to a common goal. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing each dimensions of diversity contained within each individual organizations. Today, the workforce is more diverse in terms of gender, race,

ethnicity national origin with people who are different and share different attitudes, needs, desires, values and work behavior.

Various researchers in the area of diversity in the workplace have found that industrial firms that emphasizes collectivism in the work environment see more benefits of workplace diversity than organizations that emphasize individualization (Dwyer et al, 2003). Di-Tomaso (2004) in their paper on the effects of workforce diversity highlighted the need for solutions to the challenges posed by workforce diversity. To effectively manage diversity, an organization should value diversity and charge the organization to accommodate diversity and make it an integral part of the organization. Good workforce diversity practices in the area of human resources are believed to enhance employee and organizational performance. Diversity brings the value of different employee's perspectives and varied types of contribution especially when organizational members increasingly reflect the diverse custom base of the organization. This provide a way in which organizations can understand and meet their customer's needs. As observed, organizations that discriminates either directly or indirectly curtails the potential of available talent, underutilizes the employees and loses the financial benefits of retaining them (Ellis and Sonnenfield, 1994). On the other hand, any organization that accept cultural diversity management as a progressive techniques might benefit from better employee retention, increase productivity, less absenteeism, better morale, an expanded market place and improved customer service.

### **Techniques for Improving Workforce Diversity**

Many researchers have suggested a range of techniques for improving diversity management through human resource management. Strong emphasis has been put on management philosophy that is committed to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA), appreciating and making use of diversity at the strategic level. Effective diversity management requires a culture of inclusion that creates a work environment nurturing team-work, participation and cohesiveness (Dwyer, Richard and Chadwick, 2001). Diversity culture should be emphasized in organizational vision, mission and business strategy. The formation of diversity culture requires a significant commitment of resources and leadership. In addition, formalization of human resource diversity policies are necessary as Reshin and McBrier (2000) argued that organizations with written documents for hiring and firing are necessary as an organizational guide. Kossek et al (2005) noted that measuring diversity and diversity management practices were strongly regarded as the initial step of Human Resource diversity management concern. In other words, diversity capabilities in organizations could be undermined by

the lack of attention to the documented policies and practices and proper record keeping. Cox (1993) organizational culture and the perceptions of various employee groups to identify cultural barriers could hinder the full and effective participation of all employees.

A critical analysis of the Human Resource diversity practices such as recruitment and selection procedures, performance appraisal and compensation are important techniques. Such as analysis assist to overcome unfairness, remove the glass ceiling and eradicate tokenism and resistance. In addition, periodic audits of diversity practices are necessary to identify the areas that requires improvement to manage diversity effectively.

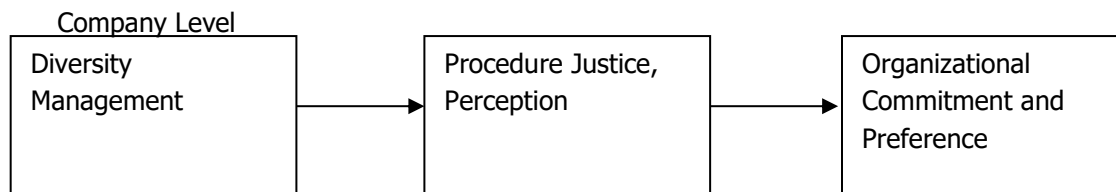
Reflecting to our discussion above, what is required in the Nigerian Listed Companies is the management philosophy that recognizes diversity as critical for organizational success. Top management commitment to diversity should be reflected in the organizational vision, mission and business strategy in order to

remove psychological and operational barriers to managing diversity. If such commitment is inconsistent with the organizational culture, then a significant culture change may be necessary in order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect of all employees. At all levels, line managers should be involved more in the decision-making process in order to fully understand and effectively implement diversity management, and the devolution of responsibility for people management.

In essence, this study attempt at filling knowledge gaps identified by establishing the leverage of the effect of workforce diversity in the Nigerian Listed Companies and to remove psychological and operational barriers to managing workforce diversity.

## METHODOLOGY

This study examines whether workforce diversity management triggers consistent effect on employees' attitudes of the Nigerian Listed Companies. The following shows the research framework:



Source: Survey Research Framework

The Researcher contacted five listed companies based in Lagos, Nigeria, with one hundred and fifty (150) employees selected for the study. Employees included in this study had more than three years of tenureship with their individual company. This cut-off was used to allow the employees to perceive justice in the company's practices and to develop commitment to the company.

Questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the objectives of the study and were administered to the respondents. Out of one hundred and fifty questionnaire, a total of one hundred and thirty-five questionnaire were collected from the Respondents with response rate of 90%. The independent variables of interest consist of the diversity management practices of the company which include compensation issues, promotion issues, training, leadership at the managerial level, while the dependent variable consist of the organization commitment and the mediator variable consist of employee perception of procedural justice.

## Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling technique was adopted to select the sample respondents. To achieve some degree of representativeness, a moderately largely sample size of 135 was used for data analysis. The reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach's alpha, construct validity was ensure by selected statements from works of Al-Lamki (2002) and Johnson (2003). Content validity was established by thorough review of a panel of five human resource professionals from different organizations.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical techniques was used to analyze demographic information to get the mean and percentages. To analyze the quantitative data, the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used to process the responses from the questionnaire. The qualitative data generated from open ended interview was organized into various themes and patterns after which the researcher evaluated and analyzed the data. The profile of respondents hereby presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

| Variable                  | Level         | Frequency  | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Gender                    | Male          | 78         | 57.78      |
|                           | Female        | 57         | 42.22      |
|                           | <b>Total</b>  | <b>135</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Age                       | 25 – 30 years | 28         | 20.74      |
|                           | 31 – 39       | 47         | 34.82      |
|                           | 40 – 49       | 35         | 25.93      |
|                           | 50 – 59       | 16         | 11.85      |
|                           | 60 – above    | 9          | 6.67       |
|                           | <b>Total</b>  | <b>135</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Educational Qualification | OND/NCE       | 28         | 20.74      |
|                           | B.Sc/HND      | 52         | 38.52      |
|                           | MBA/MA/M.Sc   | 42         | 31.11      |
|                           | Ph.D          | 5          | 3.70       |
|                           | Others        | 8          | 5.93       |
|                           | <b>Total</b>  | <b>135</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Experience                | 2 – 5 years   | 14         | 10.37      |
|                           | 6 – 10        | 37         | 27.41      |
|                           | 11 – 16       | 41         | 30.37      |
|                           | 17 -20        | 26         | 19.26      |
|                           | 20 – above    | 17         | 12.59      |
|                           | <b>Total</b>  | <b>135</b> | <b>100</b> |

Source: Survey Data

It was found out that male patterns of labour force participation were higher (57.78%) compared to female labour force participation (42.22%). It was also found

that depending upon educational qualification, employees with B.Sc/HND occupied 38% of the total workforce followed with those with MBA/MA/MSc with 31.11%. The least employees with Ph.D only 3.70% meaning that with those of Ph.D might not generate positive on impact workforce diversity programs.

From the study, we found that female were given not only few opportunities to work on important projects but sometimes ignored of their contribution in performance appraisal. We also found that employees on gender basis were dealt with in different ways which resultantly cause havoc and impact productivity. In addition, perception regarding female staff in the lead role was negative, subsequently creating stress among them. Using self reported experience reports, the listed companies used for the study were not implementing the laws, ensuring equal employment opportunities. The role of the management in unearthing the gender based discrimination was dissatisfactory, further needed support to ensure access to justice for effected female workers. We found that harassment at workplace was a key issue to be dealt with in the companies.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

| Variables                                                                   | Mean | SD   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8    | 9    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|------|
| The workforce diversity did not affect the relationship with the group      | 7.35 | 2.61 | 0.41   |        |        |        |        |        |        |      |      |
| The workforce diversity help to expedite the completion of task             | 7.18 | 2.24 | 0.43** | 0.35   |        |        |        |        |        |      |      |
| The ethnic diversity promote free flow of information                       | 6.81 | 1.66 | 0.54   | 0.33** | 0.46   |        |        |        |        |      |      |
| Workforce diversity improve quality of decision-making                      | 7.26 | 2.28 | 0.58   | 0.30   | 0.44   | 0.38** |        |        |        |      |      |
| Ethnic diversity enable find creative solution                              | 6.47 | 1.32 | 0.62** | 0.28   | 0.41   | 0.35   | 0.34   |        |        |      |      |
| Workforce diversity act as an asset for corporate image and brand value     | 5.96 | 1.28 | 0.64   | 0.26   | 0.38** | 0.26   | 0.32   | 0.38** |        |      |      |
| Older employees mentoring benefited young employees 3.86in acquiring skills | 4.75 | 1.08 | 0.66   | 0.24** | 0.36   | 0.24   | 0.28** | 0.34   | 0.28   |      |      |
| Increase employee morale and retention                                      | 3.86 | 1.04 | 0.68   | 0.20   | 0.32   | 0.18   | 0.24   | 0.29   | 0.25** | 0.23 |      |
| Train employees to be sensitive to cross cultural differences               | 3.29 | 1.03 | 0.57   | 0.19   | 0.25   | 0.14   | 0.18   | 0.27   | 0.21   | 0.19 | 0.16 |

**Note: P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01**

The descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients are shown above. From the table, it shows that workforce diversity increases employees morale and retention ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and that older employees mentoring benefited young employees in acquiring skills ( $r = 0.66$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). These results show that some human resource management practices were implemented in the Listed Companies. The least on the table ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) shows that the workforce

diversity did not affect the relationship with other employees.

In order to examine the effect of higher level variables on company's commitment as noted by Hofmann et al (2004) maintain the existence of meaningful values between group variance. To examine this assumption, we estimated a null mode in which no predictors at either level were specified. A Chi-square on the residual variance shows that companies commitment varied significantly with other non Listed Companies.

The findings of this study have significantly implications. The results indicated the need for effective diversity management. Effective diversity management through good Human Resource practices and procedures lead to positive outcomes.

We also found that ineffective diversity management in Human resource is likely to result in conflict demotivation, higher employee turnover and low organizational performance. With these results, diversity management should become a priority agenda in Human resource management practices. In this case, top management is required to have a philosophy and foster organizational culture that recognizes diversity and commit resources and leadership so as to implement diversity policies.

### **LIMITATIONS**

It should be noted that this study was bound by several limitations. Methodologically, using a single informant to measure company's Human resource practices could be regarded as a significant limitation. Other studies suggested that significant measurement error and unreliability may exist in single respondent measures (Gerhart, 1999). This study attempted to minimize such errors by making items specific in order to reduce misinterpretation. In addition, the study did not measure or control for the possible effects of social desirability bias in the questionnaire. The bias might have occurred in responding to the Likert scale questions. The relatively high scores on these scales suggested the positivity of such a bias. The small sample size should be noted. Because of this small size, the sampled Listed Companies used in the study may not be sufficiently representative to render a comprehensive conclusion. Therefore, it is necessary not only to expand the size of the sample but also to cover diverse ranges of companies. Related to the sample, the data for this study were collected from selected companies located in Lagos State, Nigeria as such employees' perceptions of management practices may also differ between the companies. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as a case of selected Listed Company. In addition, it should be noted that small and non Listed Companies might show different utilizations and perceptions of workforce diversity management practices. Therefore, further study might need to diversify the samples before generalizing these results on workforce diversity management practices.

### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the study, we found that workforce diversity among employees enhance heterogeneity of human resources and if effectively managed could serve as a competitive weapon. The study was performed with two research agenda, namely qualitative in-depth interviews were used to examine how the Listed

Companies implement their diversity management practices. The interviews showed that workforce diversity triggers positive effect on the employees of the Listed Companies.

Second, the quantitative analysis was used to examine the effect of these practices on employees commitment. Further studies might be necessary to examine more specific reasons and mechanisms. The results of this study suggested that employees noticed the positive facets of the diversity management practices reflect fair decision making in the Listed Companies and were in favour of diversity management.

We recommend that the management should protect the goodwill of the companies by adapting strategies and tactical level management practices to eliminate discrimination in recruitment and selection, promotion of employees irrespective of gender, race or ethnicity.

Second, we recommend that managing diversity successfully might help the companies to nurture creativity and innovation, thereby tap hidden capacity for growth and improved competitiveness.

Third, we recommend that companies that implement diversity programs inspire all their employees to perform to their ability which might translate to increase productivity, profit and return on investment.

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