

Exploring the Beneficial Imperatives of Workplace Diversity to Employees and Organizations in a Globalized Economy

Nwosu Chinedu Everest (Ph.D)

Department of Sociology, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria
everestinox@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The modern workplaces consist of various cultures, genders, ages, religions, and ethnicities. This diverse work environment provides opportunities for employers and managers to create and promote organizational strategies that value and manage diversity while limiting barriers and prejudices. This paper explored the beneficial imperatives of workplace diversity to employees and organizations in a globalized economy. In order to actualize the phenomena under study, this paper relied on secondary sources of data collection which consist of published books and journal articles. Systems theory was adopted as the theory suitable to guide this paper. The paper concludes that in recent times, workplace diversity has characterized most contemporary organizations with its attendant challenges and rising complications. Despite the shortfalls of diversity, there are obvious benefits that can make a diverse workforce yield a constructive outcome. This is what makes a diverse workforce striking in the contemporary global environment. The paper recommends among others that, for organizations to effectively compete and succeed in the current global economic climate there is need for adherence to workplace diversity as this would lead to organizations to actualize increased competitive climate of global business and organizational viability.

KEYWORD: Diversity, Workplace, Employees, Organizations, Globalization.

Introduction

The diversity of the global populations has been transformed by socio-economic, geo-political, environmental and technological factors over the years. These dynamics have accordingly misrepresented the compositions of many societies and prejudiced the method human beings interrelate, labor or live together with one another. As a result, according to Cletus et al, (2018), many organizations are mapping out measures to optimistically take advantage of the increasing diversity to stay and or achieve a competitive advantage. The emergence of workforce diversity was mainly to further the availability of equal opportunities in the workplace. This equal opportunity philosophy according to Bryan (1999) is designed at ensuring that organizations make the most out of the differences from a diverse workforce rather than losing talent which might assist the organization to be more efficient and effective. Organizational effectiveness can be improved through diversity. Organization's approach to managing the diversity is defined by the extent to which managers are familiar with diversity and its potential advantages and disadvantages (Price, 1997). Organizations and their management teams often define diversity too barely by tolerating, rather than embracing government rule about inclusion of gender and racial diversity in the workplace; focusing on the

prevention of legal risks rather than the achievements of diversity; and doing the least amount essential, rather than the greatest, to encourage diversity (White, 1999).

Due to change in modern technology which has given a big hand to competition and globalization, the workplace environment has changed dramatically. As a result of the change at the workplace as narrated by Ali, Sattar and Saikh (2020), diversity emerges as a big challenge for organizations in terms of conflict as well as creativity and this situation compels managers to understand and workout about the workplace diversity and make policies so that they can gain the full advantage of diversity rather than disadvantages. When employees of an organization are pro-diversity i.e., the environment is positive and there is high task motivation according to Meyer and Schermuly (2012), the fault lines (i.e., diversity in terms of gender, age, and educational background) is positively related to the performance of the employees. According to Wadhwa (2022), diverse people think about an issue from different perspectives which gains holistic view of a problem. This not only improves decision-making but also generates a feeling of inclusiveness. Additionally, it becomes easy to implement these decisions, as people/groups participating in decision-making will not oppose the decisions. Diverse views also lead to out of the box solutions. New ideas, creativity, innovation, and fresh insights can be achieved through diversity.

Workplace diversity exemplifies how individuals differ by religion, ethnicity, age, gender, physical abilities, and lifestyles. Diversity includes cultural factors such as race, gender, age, color, physical ability, ethnicity etc. The broader definition of diversity may include age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance and economic status (Wentling & Palmarivas, 2000). Workplace or workforce diversity according to Madson (2022), is a workplace in which employees possess distinct elements and qualities, differing from one another. These different elements include employee's beliefs, values, and actions that vary by gender, ethnicity, age and physical abilities. Nonetheless, the view of diversity has dramatically changed to a more proactive concept in more recent years. Diversity has significantly impacted on worker's productivity and organizational effectiveness as many business leaders are beginning to have the notion. Workplace diversity is a wide range of differences that influence how people interact and achieve business results.

Organizations have become increasingly faced with the daunting task of effectively managing the diversity they have with increasing attention directed at the importance of workplace diversity (Balogun, 2005). Workplace diversity and management of workplace diversity have become central issues of concern for managers and organizations for a variety of reasons, including the new global economy. This is because according to Owoyemi and Sheehan (2011), today's workplaces have presented the largest diversity with distinct work ethics, deep-seated attitudes, opposing perspectives and diverse motivators. Such differences have led to the emergence of various management challenges of such diversity at work. Diversity management has become a popular term used in modern society and management practice with the world that is changing or revolving constantly. Many organizations around the world have developed policies that aim to promote and manage diversity. Organizations which adopt diversity as a source of innovation, growth and development according to Emuze and James (2013) are more likely to show behavioral support and facilitate its implementation with greater focus, persistence and effort. It might be fulfilled that workplace diversity may create opportunities or pose challenges to the workplace with respect to current realities threatening organizations today.

Methodology

In order to ascertain a concise work, this paper relied on secondary sources of data collection. Information was sourced from existing literature of different studies from textbooks, journals articles, internet, that are related to the phenomenon under study.

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Conceptual Clarifications

For proper understanding of this paper, workplace diversity is conceptualized.

Conceptualizing Workplace Diversity

Diversity is defined by Patrick and Kumar (2012), as a collection of conscious practices that require comprehensive understanding and appreciation of humanity, cultures and the natural environment. It also involves a commitment to mutual respect for qualities and experiences of individuals who have different attributes. Similarly, as stated by Brouwer and Boros (2010), workplace diversity is defined as intergroup relations, which play out alongside one another in communication and interaction. It develops a host of complexities related to diversity. In another dimension, Lee and Gilbert (2014) maintained that workplace diversity based on gender, age and ethnicity cannot be seen in the same way as workforce diversity that is geared towards organizational roles and individual aptitudes. In recent times with its attendant challenges and increasing complexity, workplace diversity has characterized most modern-day organizations. Diversity management has therefore assumed enormous significance in the mitigation of the challenges of workforce diversity (Edewor *et al.* 2014). Workplace diversity can be regarded as the differences in employees as a result of the coming together of people from various backgrounds. The backgrounds that cause differences in people include race, nationality, religion, and sex, among others. Thus, the convergence of people from different races, nationalities, religions, age groups, and sexes to form a group, organization, or community constitutes workplace diversity (Tenas, 2012). It is the unremitting interface of people or employees from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds in an organization.

The major factors of diversity as postulated by Shena *et al.* (2009), are gender, age, race, color, ethnicity, and physical ability, among others. The broader definition of diversity may include age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance and economic status (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000). Some of the characteristic features of a diverse workforce as enumerated by Shena *et al.* (2009) include ways of viewing the world, diverse beliefs, understandings, values, and unique information. Diversity recognizes that people are unique and that everyone is different in a variety of visible and non-visible ways. Any factor that distinguishes one individual from another, that is, any factor by which two or more individuals are dissimilar can be seen as diversity. Such differences are often found in their races, ethnicity, as well as socio-economic, geographic, and academic/professional backgrounds. To articulate this concisely, diversity entails the diverse nature of people due to certain proportions, especially gender, race, ethnicity, personality, and culture. To further the availability as well as equal opportunities in the workplace, the emergence of workforce diversity must take place. This equal opportunity philosophy according to Bryan (1999) is aimed at ensuring that organizations make the most out of the differences from a diverse workforce rather than losing talent which might assist the organization to be more efficient and effective.

Diversity can be classified into primary and secondary category according to Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman (2001). Primary category has to do with the genetic features that influence a person's self-image and socialization, in which the individual has little or no control over. Examples include age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities. Although, technology has made it possible for individuals to change their gender, it is still classified as a primary diversity, since we are considering natural characteristics of individuals. The secondary category has to do with the learned characteristics that an individual has acquired, which the individual has some measure of control over. Examples include education, religious beliefs etc. In their own reaction Ongori and Agolla (2007) describe workplace diversity as the co-existence of employees from various socio-cultural backgrounds within the company. This entails that employees working purposively in any given organization are exceptional in terms of personal and mental attributes that make them different from other employees. Wentling and Palma-Rivas (2000) stated that companies adopt

workforce policies for ethical, regulatory and economic reasons. In a number of cases, companies adopt diversity policies for more than the above reasons. They therefore concluded that investment in diversity for economic reason is taking place because of major change in product, labor, and capital markets as well as wider social values.

Beneficial Imperatives of Workplace Diversity to Employees and Organizations in a Globalized Economy

1. Interactions Amongst Colleagues in the Workplace: Workplace diversity gives employees from different ethnic groups and cultural background the opportunity to interact with one another in the workplace. By so doing, employees can be acquainted with different norms, values, attitudes, culture, languages from different ethnic groups and regions which can aid the employees in their personal endeavors and engagements and in performing the duties assigned to them in their workplaces.

2. Enhanced Employee Performance and Organizational Development: Workplace diversity enables employees with different qualifications and diverse innovative experience to relate and co-operatively discuss the day-to-day activities in the workplace. It can come from the management officials to senior officials and down to the subordinate officials. By so doing, employees learn and develop their skills, values, attributes, and knowledge which are beneficial to them and the organization where they carry out their specific functions.

3. Acquisition of Strategies that are Beneficial to the Employee's Outside the Workplace: Workplace diversity enables employees at all levels with different religious and cultural background to share views and ideas on issues aside the day-to-day activities and work-related issues. By so doing, employees can create mutual understanding amongst them which can benefit employees immensely in maintaining cordial relationships as well as mapping out measures or strategies to resolve their self efficacies, family discrepancies, religious and ethnic differences.

4. Development of Mutual Understanding Between Employees and Management: As organizations engage employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, different languages, and innovative ideas in the workplace, employees can develop trust, confidence, co-operation, mutual understanding and maximum support and adhere strictly and work in consonance with management's decisions and directives which is advantageous to the employee's performance and organizational growth at large.

5. Creative and Innovative in Performance and Operations: Organizations that anchor on diversity tend to be creative and innovative in performing their functions and operations by exploring and bringing new ideas, skills, values and in handling specific issues in the workplace. This is due to the fact that such organizations recruit or hire employees with different skills, knowledge, talents, ideologies, diverse experience and qualifications as well as across regional and religious lines.

6. Increased Organizational Efficiency and Productivity: There is always the tendency of increased efficiency and productivity in organizations that anchor on workplace diversity. This is due to the fact that the organizations employ people from different socio-cultural background and qualifications as well as creative with wealth of experience to occupy strategic positions in the organizations. By so doing, individuals, corporate bodies etc. would transact business with the organizations which in turn leads to increased efficiency and productivity.

7. Increased Organization Image and Reputation: The image and reputation of an organization that anchors on workplace diversity is highly recognized by the people, organizations, corporate bodies, government and exceedingly placed in the society. This is due to the fact that such organizations put into consideration the necessary measures of actualizing organizational growth and viability and competitive workforce by employing and hiring people from diverse ethnic groups and across religious lines.

8. Reduced Tendency of Organization Shortfalls or Challenges: No organization can function effectively and actualize its maximum satisfaction without passing through a number of shortfalls or challenges. Organization that dwells effectively on diversity stand the chance of reducing the risk or challenges that hamper organizational growth and viability that can come in the form of low productivity and efficiency, employee low morale, employee turnover, industrial dispute, and ineffective communication.

Theoretical Framework

The Systems Theory is adopted as the theory suitable to guide this paper (theoretical framework). Systems Theory was first introduced by Van Bertalanffy in (1950) and was introduced into the organizational setting by Kataz and Khan in (1966). Systems theory is an approach to organizations which likens the enterprise to an organism with interdependent parts, each with its own specific function and interrelated responsibilities. The emphasis is that real systems are open to, and interact with their environments, and it is possible to acquire new properties through emergence resulting in continual evolution (Ryan & Bohman, 1998).

The implication and relevance of systems theory as it applies to this work is that, when an organization anchors on workplace diversity by bringing workers with different skills, values, beliefs, qualifications, race, age, gender, ethnic group, race etc. the organization is posed to compete in an economy by attracting the best available talents from the labour market, along with forming strategic partnerships between it and its clients, actualizing cordial relationships amongst workers themselves and between workers and management, ascertaining increased productivity and effectiveness in the workplace, which is a huge success to workers and organizations in a globalized economy at large.

Conclusion

In recent times, workplace diversity has characterized most contemporary organizations with its attendant challenges and rising complications. Despite the shortfalls of diversity, there are obvious benefits that can make a diverse workforce yield a constructive outcome. This is what makes a diverse workforce striking in the contemporary global environment. The benefits of workplace diversity include rapid adaptability, availability of a greater variety of alternative techniques for solving problems, in-service sourcing, and allocation of resources. There are however certain dimensions of diversity which seem to have more social significance in everyday lives, possibly because they influence the way people see themselves and the way others see them. They include culture, language, tradition, orientation, ethnic affiliation and religious inclination. In an employment context, diversity entails ensuring that organizations recruit and retain the best persons from the widest possible talent-base regardless of culture, language, tradition, values, gender, ethnicity and religion. The relevance of workplace diversity to employees and organizations cannot be over emphasized. Organizations that anchor on diversity stand the chance of reducing the emergence of industrial conflict, employee turnover as well as actualizing increased productivity and organizational effectiveness at large.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are deemed imperative for this paper.

1. For organizations to effectively compete and succeed in the current global economic climate, there is need for the organizations' adherence to workplace diversity as this would enable the organizations to actualize increased competitive climate of global business and organizational viability.
2. Complex organizations will seize to strive without adherence to workplace diversity. Therefore, organizations must develop strategies for diversified workforce. By so doing, the organizations will stand to benefit immensely in increased workers productivity and organizational effectiveness at large.

3. The world has become globalized. So, organizations should ensure acquiescence to workplace diversity as it would help organizations to be creative and innovative in tackling and solving the challenges bedeviled by organizations which are equally hindrances to organizational growth and development.
4. Diversity should be encouraged in organizations in the sense that exposing employees in an environment of diverse culture, values, opinions and ideas is a panacea towards increased employee's skills, values, attitudes, potentials and productivity as well as actualizing organizational desires and maximum satisfaction.
5. In a globalized economy, diversity should be encouraged by organizations. This is because, when workers work with colleagues with varied qualifications, cultures and innovative ideas in a diverse workplace, the fundamental notions of ethnocentric are ultimately elevated to the fore, confronted and dispensed.

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