

# Unity in Diversity: Implications for Managers

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## Abstract

This Study empirically examined the nature of the relationship between the Management of ethnic and religious diversity and Corporate Performance of firms in Nigeria. In Nigeria, a Nation with several ethnic nationalities and languages, as well as diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, the issue of diversity appears to be one of the most important challenges to managers. Nigeria which has grown from a basically agrarian society is now regarded as one of the most populous industrially developing nations in the world, which is richly endowed with abundant human and natural resources. However, most of the economic drawbacks of the nation are attributable to the inability of the organizations to perform optimally. This Paper believes that the proper management of a diverse workforce is the key to achieving optimum corporate performance and highlights challenging issues which have implications for managers.

**Key words:** Workforce, diversity, Ethnicity, Religion, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Since Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960 she has prided herself as a nation with a great sense of oneness in spite of the civil war of between 1967 to 1970 and the apparent physical and psychological differences in the persons that make it up. Diversity in workplaces is one issue that has bothered on the behavior of employees and has been attributed to be the cause of many political and Interpersonal conflicts as well as a source of creativity and improved wellbeing at the workplace. Managers of work organizations will thus be faced with a critical challenge of the management of diversity in the work place. Critics of the business case for the management of workforce diversity believe that the organizational benefit to be gained from workforce diversity management are too narrow or short-lived that such benefits might be partial rather than comprehensive. For this reason, many managers of such opposing view seem to pay little attention to the issue of managing the physiological and psychological differences in human qualities and idiosyncrasies which are reflected in demographic differences.

Suffice it to say that the survival of organizations in Nigeria is crucial to the economic health and instrumental to the strategic positioning of the Country in the comity of nations. The increasing presence of women, persons with diverse personalities and attitudes as well as those with other psychological make ups working in organizations in Nigeria today calls for the urgent management of such diversity. To be taken even more seriously in organizations which intend to survive in Nigeria's "Unity in Diversity" are the twin issues of ethnicity and religion.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This work drew heavily from the Self categorization theory. The self categorization theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others to simplify their environment (Markus and Cross, 1990; Kahn, 2009). The theory draws from the ideas of group psychology, individualism and interactionism to produce a framework of group interaction and its impact on development of the self-concept. According to the theory, people self-categorize "depending on whether a social categorization into in- group and out -group can meaningfully be applied to the current social context". In one setting, it may be more advantageous for someone to group himself according to race, ethnic affinity or religion, whereas in another setting benefit may be derived from categorizing himself based on gender or educational experience. The idea is that there is a tendency for a person to categorize himself/herself in a group that will provide association with a higher status. Categorization processes may be triggered when members are dissimilar, resulting in the tendency for individuals to evaluate members of other subgroups more negatively than members of their own subgroup (Brewer, 1979). In general, self-categorization theory assumes that when people evaluate self-defining categories positively they are motivated to maintain such evaluations. Positive evaluation of self categories is associated with positively evaluating others who fit within the same category (Jackson *et.al*, 2003). In general, then, certain diversity characteristics may be relevant categories that individuals use as part of their self-categorization in the context of a given social unit, such as an organization or a work group (Tsui *et. al*, 1992). Additionally, studies have indicated that as the proportion of individuals who possess a particular characteristic grows smaller, people who possess the minority characteristic

will become increasing self aware of their distinct characteristics (Ethier and Deaux, 1994; McGuire *et.al*, 1978). A situational setting, such as a work group, in which an individual is dissimilar to a majority of the members may make the individual uncomfortable because of the increased awareness that his or her characteristics are different from others and, thus, result in lower attitudes and behaviours (Hogg 2007).

## 2.1 Ethnic Diversity

Ethnicity is the set of cultural characteristics that often overlaps with race. Ethnicity and race are usually studied together as they relate to employment outcomes such as hiring decisions, performance evaluations, pay and work place discrimination. Business people may feel more secure when they understand and can communicate easily with their partners. Defining an ethnic group in Nigeria is usually a combination of a number of factors: a shared language or related dialects, myth of common origin, shared cultural traits, a core territory, and often, a shared religious or spiritual universe (Mustapha, 2011). Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The authors opine that in both competitive and non-competitive settings, Nigerians are more likely to define themselves in terms of their ethnic affinities than any other identity. Nigeria is easily described as a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic Nation. Although, the actual figure for the total number of ethnic groups in Nigeria appears elusive as estimates seem to vary widely depending on the criteria used, Otite (2000) provides a tentative figure of more than 389 ethnic groups. The three most populous ethnic groups, based on the 1963 Census, are Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, respectively. There is common agreement, however, that these ethnic groups are broadly divided into ethnic 'majorities' and ethnic 'minorities'. The numerically – and politically - major ethnic groups are the composite Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast. These three 'hegemonic' ethnic groups are popularly referred to by the generic term '*wazobia*' while there are 'large minorities' like the Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, and the Tiv. (Mustapha, 2005).

Langer and Ukiwo, (2007) are of the view that precise figures of the size of these ethnic groups are unavailable because of the omission of ethnicity in population censuses. Mustapha (2011) on his part posits that this confusion over numbers has as much to do with problems of classification and data gathering as with the tendency for ethnic segments to coalesce or differentiate in the face of economic or political developments. Ibrahim (2006) is of the view that much of Nigeria's politics revolves around methods of preventing or resisting fears of domination of one region or ethnic group over the others. It was apparently because ethnicity appears to be so politically salient, that policies such as the Federal Character Principle were introduced. To cope with the challenges created by this multi-ethnic society, and to encourage a spirit of 'unity in diversity' successive Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria including the various sections and sub-sections of the 1999 Constitution as amended in 2011, the Federal Character Principle and the Federal character Commission have been some of the attempts to promote power sharing and protect 'relatively disadvantaged groups'. The anti-discrimination clause as contained in section 42 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended in 2011 requires that no citizen of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion is subject to disabilities, restrictions, privileges or advantages to which other citizens are not subject. Section 14, sub-section 3 of the Constitution stipulates that the composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (1999 Constitution). Some other sections which reiterate the Federal Character Principles may include section 147, sub-section 3 which stipulates that the President shall make appointments to the office of the Minister of the Federation in conformity with the provisions of Section 14(3) of the Constitution: Provided that in giving effect to the provisions aforesaid the president shall appoint at least one Minister from each State who shall be an indigenes of such State; and Section 171(5), which compelled the President to take due regard of the federal character of Nigeria in appointing persons to such offices as the secretary to the Government of the Federation; Head of the Civil Service of the Federation; Ambassadors, High Commissioners or other principal Representative of Nigeria abroad ;Permanent Secretaries of Federal Ministries or Head of any Extra-Ministerial Department of the Government of the Federation; and the personal staff of the President. Similarly, Sections 217 (3) stipulates that the composition of the officer corps and other ranks of the armed forces of the Federation shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria, while section 219 called for the establishment of a body to ensure that the composition of the armed forces does comply with the federal character principle in a manner as prescribed by section 217. The policy praised by some as the 'cornerstone of ethnic justice and fair government', while others blamed it for frustrated career expectations and condemned it as a discriminatory barrier or regarded it as 'geographical apartheid' (Suberu, 2001).

The Federal Character Principle which involves the use of quota systems, tend to ensure that different ethnic groups are represented at many levels in the political system and the bureaucracy. The Principle requires that there will be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic groups in the government or any

of its agencies. The Federal Character Commission enforces compliance with the Federal Character Principle, and in particular establishes monitors and enforces an equitable formula for the distribution of employment in the public services across the 36 states in the country. It is apparent that merit has continued to be the yardstick for recruitment into the Federal Civil Service. However, Oyovbaire, (1983) observed that the Federal Character Principle has been accused of encouraging mediocrity in positions of power. This author notes that this Principle appear to help to solve one problem – that of a heavily lop-sided bureaucracy -, but then creates another – inter-ethnic discord and acrimony -, particularly within the bureaucracy itself. ;and that this problem will persist until a way is found to practice federal character while simultaneously protecting technocratic principles of merit and due process, and giving due respect to the rights of all workers. In spite of efforts to be united in diversity, there are still allegations of nepotism and tribalism in Nigeria. Mustapha (2005) has observed that ethno-linguistic and regional identities remain strong in Nigeria as private sector bureaucracies in the media, banks, the formal sector economy, and even civil society, continue to manifest considerable ethnic bias with minimum effort at correcting the imbalances. The manager of an organization where people with such array of diversity work together, will be faced with the challenge of ensuring that there is neither conflict nor clash of interest in terms of policies and practices of the organization, nor among individual workers. It has been observed that Nigerians tend to cluster more readily around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of the workplace (Lewis and Bratton ,2000). This factor should not be taken for granted because in addition to the challenge of managing formal groups in organizations, other invisible but very powerful groups in Nigerian organizations based on tribal, ethnic, geographical and language lines, have the capacity to affect work motivation and job satisfaction (Nwachukwu, 2000). Ethnicity is one diversity dimension that seems to have raised so much controversy. In employment settings, individuals tend to favour colleagues of the own race in performance evaluations, promotion decisions, and pay raises. The effects of any biased preferences appear to have been consistent and could be reflected in cases of high employee turnover. In a place like Nigeria where unemployment rate is high and alternative jobs may be unavailable, a disgruntled employee may remain in the organization and not only redefine his obligation in the psychological contract but also induce workplace sabotage.

## **2.2 Religious Diversity**

Nigerians may be easily described as the most religious people in the world. Before the advent of what may be described as “strange religions”, Africans and indeed Nigerians had traditional religions which they practiced. Hogg, et al. (2010) see the extent to which a person identifies with a religion, subscribes to its ideology or worldview, and conforms to its normative practices as religiosity .Their argument is that religions have attributes that make them suited to reduce feelings of self-uncertainty. Some religions place greater emphasis on allowing events to develop in their own way or just letting things happen. Moslems and Hindus are more likely to tow this line or thinking. Ahiauzu (1999) sees some Africans as very religious sets of persons who appear to believe in the doctrine of destiny and thus do not attach much importance to hard work. Other religions on the other hand may teach and practice religious that teach them to try to control matters. There are some religions that teach reincarnation while some others do not believe in such doctrines and feel that “pass this way only once, so that they want to get as much done here and now as they can. While some religions may preach the importance of caring for and sharing with others (collectivism), some others may be more individualistic. These differing religious values and attitudes may have their effect on work habits and behaviours. It is crucial to integrate various religious values and attitudes with approaches that the conducive to success in high growth, market economies.

Prayer may be seen as a religious coping effort, which has been observed to have a significant impact in addressing problems and reducing stress and anxiety (Moberg, 2005). Prayer has been observed to have a positive impact on job Satisfaction and that individuals who subscribe to the use of prayer will have an increased sense of motivation to achieve goals. In line with this thinking, faith, spirituality, and prayer have been correlated to an increase in motivation (Masters, 2005). Studies have indicated that individuals who pray as part of an overall spiritual relationship with a higher power and are religious due to intrinsic motivation tend to be more confident in their ability to make career decisions and are open to exploring a variety of career options (Duffy and Bluestein, 2005). Turton and Francis (2007) identified a positive correlative between prayer and work-related psychological health. Furthermore, Bacchus, and Holley (2004) found that individuals use prayers to find personal strength, peace, and guidance to cope with stressful situations in the workplace. The combination of employee’s perception of workplace equity with prayer as a motivating factor and coping mechanism appears to result in employees who experience inequity in their jobs but are not dissatisfied. This may be as a result of the role prayer plays in motivating persons in achieving goals and coping with workplace stress. Employees with a higher belief in prayer appear to have a higher sense of workplace equity as prayer life and workplace equity have been shown to have significant correlation (Adams, 2008). In work settings, spirituality and prayer have been seen to have a positive correlation to intrinsic motivation and goal setting among managers from across service industries (Biswas and Biswas, 2007). Prayer was one strategy identified to have been used by the executives to overcome the challenge of stress in the workplace and concluded that prayer is a coping

mechanism for business executives.

There is an important overlap between ethnicity and religion in Nigeria. The Hausa/Fulani and Kanuri are predominantly Muslims, the Igbo and Southern minorities predominantly Christians, and the Yoruba and Northern minorities have an almost equal number of adherents of both religions (Langer and Ukiwo, 2007). From the point of view of identity formation however, it has been observed that in parts of Northern Nigeria, commonly referred to as the 'core' or 'Hausa-Fulani North', religious identity appears to be more critical than ethnic identity and in fact serves to activate ethnicity (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Thus, among Nigeria's two largest ethnic groupings, the (southern) Yoruba were considerably more prone to define themselves ethnically than were the (northern) Hausa-Fulani, who rather opted for a religious (Muslim) identity (Lewis and Bratton 2000). Religious identities in Nigeria are usually classified into three – Christian, Muslim and Traditional. Of the three, traditional religions are the least politically active; numbering several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups; and, involving the worship of different gods and goddesses (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). These Native religions in which people believe in deities, spirits and ancestor worship, are spread throughout the country and suffice it to say that many Muslims and Christians may also intertwine their beliefs with more unorthodox indigenous ones. Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and conflict, with Nigerian Muslims much more likely to evince or articulate a religious identity than Christians (Lewis and Bratton 2000). This differentiation underlies the North-South cleavage in terms of the North being predominantly Muslim and the South predominantly Christian. However, underneath the broad Christian-Muslim categories are several sub-cleavages that have at one time or the other been politically salient or have the potential to be, and have generated intra-group conflicts. Among Christians, there are several denominations, including: the Protestants (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran), the Catholics, the Evangelical Church of West Africa, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a host of 'home-grown', 'white garment' (Aladura and Celestial) and Pentecostal churches (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The authors observe that Pentecostal churches may have witnessed a rapid growth in number in the recent past with many adherents, especially youths, crossing over from the older and more traditional denominations. Muslims on the other hand belong to different sects, including the Ahmadiyya, Sanusiyya, Tijanniyya and Quadriyya (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in all its versions and revisions always had the statement that the people of Nigeria have decided to live together in "one nation under God". The recognition of presence of God in the nation is all pervasive, even though this one God is worshipped in a diversity of creeds (Onaiyekan, 2010). Religion has been regarded as a source of unity, happiness and social elevation. However, it sometimes appears to be taking the lead as a foremost contributing factor to hatred, war, terrorism and religious combat. Where it is believed that belonging to a particular religion, religious denomination or sect may be a veritable tool for empowerment, more people may tend to claim to be members of that group. This may be consistent with the observation by Ejimofor (2008) that some personalities from a tribe of Southern Nigeria extraction, who recognized the influence of religion as a tool to gain political power, claimed a religion that will align them to the North. It should be noted that the Laws as embedded in Section 42 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as amended in 2011, prohibit employers from discriminating against employees based on their religion.

However, people usually question each other's belief systems. It may be observed that within a religion, differences could be noticed due to the ethnicity, faith, tradition, level of education, income level and degree of religious observance. Thus, even within religions, sectarian differences may still lead to conflict. Whether, overt or covert, there may be both perceived and real differences in religious beliefs which may account for certain prejudices and biases in organizations. Religion may not have been an organizational issue but as far as religious beliefs prohibit or encourage certain behaviours, this diversity issue would need to be understood and addressed. For example, many Christians do not believe they should work on Sundays, while the Adventists and conservative Jews believe they should not work on Saturdays, other "religious persons" may also believe that they have an obligation to express their beliefs in the workplace. Those who do not share those beliefs may object. Real or perceived religious discrimination have accounted for violent conflicts and other undesirable outcomes in organizations.

### 3.0 Methodology

The cross-sectional survey design was adopted for analyzing the primary data. The desk research was adopted in the collection of the secondary data. To analyze the primary data, copies of the questionnaire were sent to managers in the firms in the sample. Personal interviews were held in a non-contrived setting. More data on ethnicity and religion as well as data on corporate performance indices were obtained from file reports and annual reports. This research was limited to manufacturing firms in the South-South geo-political region of Nigeria. To select a sample from a population of Seventy Firms (70), being the total number of firms registered by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (M.A.N.) in the South-South Geo-political Region. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) model for sample size determination was used to get a sample size was fifty-nine (59)

respondents. The descriptive statistics which deals with the presentation of demographic and other related data of this study was done through the use of frequency tables and charts. However, for inferential purposes and the empirical evaluation of the variables (predictor and criterion) of this study, the Spearman's Rank order Correlation Coefficient (Rho or  $r_s$ ) was used.

#### 4.0 Results and Findings

The result of this study reveals Ethnicity to be related to corporate productivity with correlation coefficient of  $rho = -0.722$ ; profitability,  $rho = -0.499$ ; innovativeness,  $rho = -0.475$  and rate of employee turnover,  $rho = -0.606$ . These were highly significant at 0.01 levels, 2-tailed,  $p < 0.05$ . The study also shows Religion to be related to corporate productivity with correlation coefficient of  $rho = -0.539$ ; profitability,  $rho = -0.394$ ; innovativeness,  $rho = -0.335$  and rate of employee turnover,  $rho = -0.515$ . These were highly significant at 0.01 levels, 2-tailed,  $p < 0.05$ . The correlation analysis done using Spearman rank order correlation coefficient showed that an inverse relationship exists between ethnicity and religion and corporate productivity, profitability and innovativeness (indicators of firms performance). This may imply that the greater the extent to which employees are bothered about issues of ethnicity and religion, the lower the output level of the firm, the lower the firm's ability to meet and exceed its financial benchmarks and the lower the amount of new ideas generated by the firm will likely be and vice versa. While a direct relationship exists between ethnicity and religion and rate of employee turnover (an indicator of firms performance). This may imply that the greater the extent to which employees are bothered about issues of ethnicity and religion, the more the employees would leave the firm and vice versa.

#### 5.0 Discussion

Studies have shown that discrimination in any form especially when looked at from the angle of ethnicity and/or religion may lead to aggression frustration and other frustration reactions (Fox and Spector, 1999; Karsten, 2006). Ibrahim (2006) is of the view that much of Nigeria's politics revolves around methods of preventing or resisting fears of domination of one region or ethnic group over the others. In this study, it was observed that even in firms where a minority ethnic group seems to be in the majority, there may be other differences which vary along such subgroups dimensions as dialect, village, clan and kin group all of which tend to create tension. As far as tension often increases infighting, the firms' productivity will likely be affected negatively. In line with the observations of Osaghae and Suberu (2005), this study observed that the greater the extent to which employees are bothered with issues of religion and religious groupings the lower the firm's output level.

The dichotomous issue of profit and the not-for-profit organization clearly speaks of the profit orientation of these different types of firms. All the firms which constituted the sample for this study were profit oriented organizations. This may imply that certain benchmarks of financial indices were set by the firms to determine if they were actually making profit or not. In this study this profit orientation was looked at in terms of the firm's ability to meeting and exceeding financial benchmarks. Brockner, *et. al.* (1993) believe that certain persons who are worried about stressful circumstances in the workplace tend to get focused on only those activities that will enable them keep their jobs. In such situations, corporate citizenship behaviours will tend to reduce. Gardberg and Fombrun (2006) has observed that corporate citizenship activities enhances firm's profitability. Still in this line Konrad (2003), has stated three primary arguments in the business case for diversity. First, competition for the best talent requires organizations to reach out and embrace an increasingly diverse labour pool. Secondly, a global economy requires that organizations have a diverse workforce so that they can effectively deal with an increasingly diverse customer base. Thus, a diverse workforce can lead to an increased market share.

High employee turnover by whomever and for whatever reason would surely have grave implications for firms as this is a key measure of its performance. In this study the results of the test to examine the correlation between ethnic and religious diversity and rate of employee turnover showed a direct relationship. This may imply that the more employees are bothered with issues of ethnicity and religion the more likely it is that they would leave the firm. However, the current unemployment index in Nigeria stands at 23.9% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). This may perhaps account for the reason why the propensity to leave the firm is appear higher than the rate at which employees actually leave. The employees would probably actually leave their firms only if they had similar opportunities nearby. This is perhaps because employees' propensity to leave will only lead to turnover when there are alternatives. Studies have shown that when employees feel depressed, anxious and worry about issues in their workplace, they begin to feel insecure on their jobs and begin to think about leaving the organization. Studies have shown a positive relationship between job insecurity and propensity to leave (Hartley *et. al.*, 1991).

For success, organizations must foster innovation and to do this, they will need to maintain flexibility, continually improve their quality, and beat their competitors in the market place with a constant stream of innovative products and services. Robbins and Judge (2011) believe that an organization's employees can be the impetus for innovation and change or they can be a major stumbling block. People of different cultural

backgrounds, age and gender may provide diverse perspectives, valuable ideas, problem-solving abilities, and in this way facilitate the achievement of optimal creative solutions and therefore stimulate innovations (Hong and Page, 2004). People of different ethnic backgrounds may also possess knowledge about global markets and customers tastes (Berliant and Fujita,2008). If this is the case, then firms could benefit from the growing diverse cultural backgrounds, demographic, and knowledge bases of the workforces. However, studies focusing on the relationship between labor diversity and firm's innovation show a paradox. Basset-Jones (2005) opined that whereas labor diversity can be a source of creativity and therefore foster innovation activity, a high degree of heterogeneity among workers may induce misunderstanding, conflicts and uncooperative behaviors within workplaces and in this way hinder innovation. A proper management of the diverse workforce becomes imperative.

When interpersonal bonds weaken, employees become actively aware of their zero-sum interdependence. That is, when positions are scarce, a colleague's survival in the organization might mean one's own demise. Trust diminishes and people become more guarded in what they share and disclose. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) observe that by virtue of its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflicts and instability. By the time this happens the firms' innovativeness may be stifled. Attitude clusters comprising suspicion, anger, demoralization, helplessness and stress reactions usually distract employees and interfere with their ability to concentrate on the task at hand not to talk of coming up with new ideas. The firm itself may be preoccupied with trying to mend 'broken fences' or at a loss as to what to do with inexplicable interpersonal and inter group conflicts and rivalry and solving old problems than to think of new challenges or monitor external environmental trends.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

The management of a diverse workforce is not about emphasizing the differences in its constituents but about getting the best of their uniqueness for optimum corporate performance. Ethnic and religious bigotry are twin issues which may be the cog in the wheel of progress in the unity of Nigeria's diversity. Organizations may not be isolated from the recurrent diversity-related issues in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that many dysfunctional diversity-related issues in organizations may not result from the apparent or real differences in the workforce but may be that the case that the prevailing corporate structure and cultures may be conducive for the perpetration of hostilities between individuals and groups.

In as much as the various levels of the Nigerian government are making spirited efforts to foster unity in Diversity in the society, managers of organizations must develop strategies to boost their corporate performance in the face of the prevailing circumstances. Concerned managers may not be able to coerce or cajole individuals to work together cooperatively but the aim of having a united diverse workforce may be easier achieved if certain stereotypic barriers are broken down by corporate cultures evolved to sufficiently transform the individuals to recognize and appreciate the worth and uniqueness of others and the design and implementation of organizations structures and processes with a social conscience which will allow for equity, fairness and justice in the distribution of organizations favours and punishments as well as in the balancing of the psychological contract.

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