

# Exploring the Relationship between Diversity and Workplace Friendship

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## Abstract

The study examined the impact of diversity on workplace friendship of transport and logistic sector in Nigeria with a particular reference to. The objectives of this research work were to determine the significant relationship between perceived value diversity, diversity climate and workplace friendship and also to determine the significant difference between diversity climate, perceived value diversity and workplace friendship. In addition, the study investigated whether perceived value diversity and diversity climate were predictors of workplace friendship. The study employed survey research. Primary data was used for the study with questionnaires as researcher's instrument. The three hypotheses formulated for this study were tested with multiple regression analysis, and Pearson's correlation analysis. The findings of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between diversity climate and workplace friendship. It also showed that there was a significant relationship between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship. It was concluded that diversity climate and perceived value diversity influenced workplace friendship. Based on the findings from this study, it was recommended that organization should establish diversity program to help gain friendship in workplace.

**Keywords:** perceived value diversity, diversity climate and workplace friendship

## Introduction

Diversity has been an evolving concept the term is both specific on individual as well as groups of people. Many current writers define diversity as any significant difference that distinguish one individual from another – A description that takes into account a broad range of over and hidden qualities and according to How (2007) a broad definition also enables all staff to feel included rather than excluded encouraging them to connect and strengthen relationships that enable employees to deal with more potentially volatile issues that may later arise. The subject of diversity has not been a major problem in Africa until recently. The concept of diversity management gained attention because of the globalization and the need for more companies to spread extensively in order to reach customers across the world there has been since 1990's a lot of work subject most of the publications deal with the following components of workforce diversity, how to manage a diversity workforce in organization, benefits of managing workforce diversity disadvantages of workforce diversity in the workplace.

Workplace Friendship According to Fehr (1996), friendship is “a voluntary, personal relationship typically providing intimacy and assistance”. The definitions of WF, however, are distinct from general types of friendship because workplace friendship is focused on friendship occurred in the workplace (Song, 2005). Berman et al. (2002) define workplace friendship as “nonexclusive voluntary workplace relations that involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests and values”. WF is a phenomenon that is beyond mere behaviors engaged in friendly ways among people in an organization; there should be “trust, liking, and shared interests or values” rather than being only mutual acquaintances (Berman et al., 2002,). Functions Workplace Friendship WF has been considered valuable for both individuals and organizations. According to Fine (1986), WF increases support and resources that help [-individuals to accomplish their job, reduce work stress, and provide increased communication, cooperation, and energy. Hamilton (2007) also suggested that when in a friendship at work, people might feel comfortable with their workplace friends and reduce feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. They also share more information and empathies with workplace friends about work-related problems and concerns. Jehn and Shah (1997) further argued that employees in a friendship exchange words of encouragement, confidence, trust, respect, and critical feedback, which may increase enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

## Hypotheses

Three hypotheses focused on in this study are embedded in the following objectives:

- 1.) To determine whether diversity climate and perceived value diversity will jointly and independently predict work place friendship.
- 2.) To explore the relationship between diversity climate and workplace friendship.

3.) To investigate the relationship between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship.

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

Diversity is mostly defined as the ways in which persons differ from each other (Pollar & Gonzales 1994) or the distinctive characteristics of individuals (Brown, Snedeker & Sykes 1997). While original definitions (Carter et al. 1982) refer to the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, nationality, age and religion, additional dimensions have been included throughout the years to the definition of diversity: sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, education level, physical (dis)ability, and moral values. In line with these definitions, studies on diversity in organizations generally define diversity by referring to one or more employees' socio-demographic traits such as gender, race, ethnicity and age, and subsequently examine the effects of these differences on a variety of organizational practices and outcomes (Milliken & Martins 1996).

Within a dynamic, process-oriented theory of identity and diversity, individuals are not seen as unidimensional representatives of a socio-demographic group but as evolving and multidimensional, acting and interacting within a specific cultural and historical context, characterized by specific power relations (Litvin 1997). Diversity is a relational phenomenon (Nkomo & Cox 1996). A relational understanding of diversity relies upon the assumption that identity is fluid and contingent upon social relations (Alvesson & Billing 1998; Brickson & Brewer 2001). Identity is not innate, stable or fixed but socially and historically constructed and subject to contradictions, revisions, and change (Hall 1992). A social construction view emphasizes the processes through which identity is accomplished and differences become salient to individuals and groups in organizations (Gergen 1985; Somers 1994; Wharton 1992). In our perspective, relationships between individuals play an important role in these processes of social construction. Questions like 'Who am I?', 'Who is different?' or 'Who is the other?' are not answered once and for all, but are constantly addressed in social interactions. For example, a woman may see herself as a result-oriented manager when interacting with her colleagues, as a loving mother when interacting with her child, and as a politically conservative voter when discussing politics with her friends. Behavior that in the essentialized perspective is attributed to the individual alone is in a dynamic perspective seen as the result of negotiated relationship with other individuals.

In this perspective, while people might share a certain demographic profile, their identities are not necessarily similar, because they develop in interaction with different people. Consequently, in order to understand the meaning of diversity and identity, one needs to focus on relationships rather than on social categories. Such a focus can help us to understand how different types of interactions may influence identity construction. In her recent research, Foldy (2003) distinguishes between 'spotlighting interactions' and 'expression-shaping interactions.' Spotlighting interactions emphasize particular aspects on one's identity through which the individual becomes more aware of this particular identity aspect. For instance, when colleagues at work ask a lot of questions about one's religion and cultural background, these two identity aspects are made more salient.

Expression-shaping interactions are interactions that push individuals to change the ways they express their identity. For instance, a black woman downplayed her racial identity after, in occasional conversations about racism, other (white) women reacted that she was developing a negative attitude. A second important implication of a relational approach is the need to reconsider the assumption that identities are internally coherent and consistent over time (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Shotter & Gergen 1989). Because individuals interact with different people, who can confirm, support or disrupt different identity claims, their identities are likely to present a number of ambiguities and unsolved tensions. Zannoni and Janssens's (2005) in-depth analysis of four minority employees' identities in the workplace well illustrates this point. They recount the story of a female midwife of Moroccan origins, who usually wears the Muslim headscarf but has to take it off at work. During her interview, she states that she has come to terms with this rule. However, she mentions feeling like a 'double person' and draws from Islamic principles to justify herself for not wearing the headscarf all the time. Her account clearly reveals the tensions and even the potential conflict between her private and professional identities, emerging from relations with different individuals in different contexts. The authors further speculate that minority employees' identities might be particularly ambiguous and incoherent because, as minority members, they are per definition more likely to come in contact with individuals with disparate expectations within more diverse contexts.

Workplace friendship has been drawing the attention of, and broadly discussed by scholars (Payne and Hauty, 1955; Nadler, 1979; Kram and Isabella, 1985; Berman, West and Richter, 2002; Barley and Kunda, 2001; Mao, 2006; Miller, Rutherford, and Kolodinsky, 2008) as it promotes organizational and employee outcomes and helps achieve goals. Employees may need work-related knowledge, information, and skills to accomplish their missions and goals or emotional support to relieve work stress, and workplace friendship can provide both instrumental support (Berman et al., 2002) and emotional support (Kram and Isabella, 1985; Berman et al., 2002).

In her study of the formation of workplace friendships, Dotan (2007) identified six main reasons as to why individuals form friendships at work; namely: 1) Work Safety/Trust; 2) Missing Role; 3) Sanity Check; and 4)

Work-values/Life-interests Similarity (WVLI); 5) Proximity, and 6) Instrumentality. Generally, Work Safety/Trust is a factor of friendship formation that is affective or emotional in nature. It is based on an internal feeling of safety and trust with regard to work-related issues/experiences and motivates an individual to pursue a friendship relationship with the given coworker for this reason. Missing Role is a factor of workplace friendship formation that is also affective in nature and suggests that “individuals are likely to form friendships with others who are potential substitutes or resemble some important person or role-model in their life: a mother or father figure, a son, a sister or even themselves at some past stage” (Dotan, 2007). Sanity Check is factor of formation that is cognitive in nature and suggests that individuals will likely form a friendship with a coworker to gain reassurance for the way they are thinking; to gain cognitive confirmation or validation for a particular point of view and regain a feeling of competence.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The design for this study is a survey design with diversity as independent variable which was measured by perceived value diversity, diversity climate and workplace friendship as dependent variable.

#### **Subjects**

The respondents of this study were one hundred and ninety six employees of Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, Apapa Lagos State who were selected using stratified random sampling technique.

#### **Instruments**

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire which was divided into four parts. Section A contains demographic information of the respondents which includes age, sex, marital status, educational qualification e.t.c. Section B (I) measures diversity climate scale which was based on the work of Mc Kay et al (2008) with a reliability of 0.75 the scale consist of 5 item using a 5- point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Section B(ii) measures perceived value diversity which was based on the work of Jehn (1997) with a Cronbach alpha of 0.85, the scale consist of 5 item using a 5- point likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Employee workplace friendship scale is a 6- item scale of Nielsen et al (2000) on a 5- point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree(5). The instrument were revalidated and the Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficients gave the following results; diversity climate=.67, perceived value diversity=.83 and workplace friendship=.69

#### **Data Analysis**

The demographic information was analysed using frequency counts and simple percentage. Hypothesis 1 was tested using multiple regression while hypothesis 2 was analysed using Pearson’s Correlation while hypothesis 3 was analysed using multiple regression.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Analysis of Demographical Variables**

SEX	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	91	46.4
Female	105	53.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-25	73	34.9
26-35	46	22.0
36-45	30	14.4
46-55	60	28.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	79	37.8
Married	100	47.8
Divorced	13	6.2
Separated	17	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Post graduate	38	18.1
BSC,HND	90	43.1
OND,NCE	44	21.1
SSCE	37	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Cadre	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Management staff	87	41.6
Senior staff	41	19.6
Junior staff	81	38.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Department	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sales	25	12.0
Marketing	50	23.9
Personnel	50	23.9
Logistic	40	19.1
Production	44	21.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: field survey (2011)

Table1 shows that there were 91(36.4%) males and 159(63.6%) females, 63(25.2%) of the respondents were of the age range 18-25, 82(32.8%) were age ranged 26-35, 80(32.0%) were of age range 36-45, 25(10.0%) were of age range 46-55. The table also showed that 94(37.6%) of the respondents were single, the married were 144(57.6%), the divorced accounted for 10(4.0%) while the separated were 2(.8%).

The educational background of the respondents showed that 38(18.2%) had the Postgraduate certificates, 90(43.1%) had BSC, HND certificates, 44(21.1%) had OND, NCE certificates, while 37(17.7%) attained secondary school education.

The cadre of the respondent showed that 87(41.6%) were management staff, the senior staff were 41(19.6%) while 81(38.8%) were junior staff. The department of the respondents showed that the sales were 25(12.0%), the Marketing were 50(23.9%), the Personnel were 50(23.9%), the Logistic were 40(19.1%) while the Production were 44(21.1%) respectively.

### Hypotheses Testing

H1: Diversity climate and perceived value diversity will jointly and independently predict workplace friendship. Hypothesis I was set to examine whether diversity climate, perceived value diversity, will jointly and independently predict workplace friendship. In order to examine this, a multiple regression was carried out to see their joint prediction while a simple linear regression was also conducted to examine their independent prediction.

In order to test for this hypothesis, the multiple regressions were carried out and the result obtained is presented below:

**TABLE 4.3.1a: Showing Multiple regression of diversity climate, perceived value diversity and workplace friendship**

Variables	F- ratio	Significance of P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\bar{R}^2$	B	T	Probability
Diversity climate	3.570	.030	.189	.036	.026	-.218	-2.384	.018
Perceived value diversity						-.065	-.819	.414

The table above showed that the linear combination effects of diversity climate and perceived value diversity, will jointly and independently predict workplace friendship and was significant with  $F(3,193) = 3.570$ ;  $R = .189$ ;  $R^2 = .036$ ;  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .026$   $P < 0.05$ . The result indicates that it is significant at 5%. The independent predictor variables jointly accounted for a variation of about 4 percent. This however, shows a low predictions of all these independent predictor on workplace friendship.

**TABLE 4.3.1b;** Based on the independent result, the result obtained are presented below

$H_1$ : diversity climate will independently predict workplace friendship

Variable	F-Ratio	Significant of P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\bar{R}^2$	B	T	P
Diversity climate	6.480	0.012	0.180	0.032	0.027	20.514	11.388	.000

The table above showed that the independent prediction of diversity climate on workplace friendship and was significant with  $F(1,195) = 6.480$ ;  $R = .180$ ;  $R^2 = .032$ ;  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .027$   $P < 0.01$ . The result indicates that it is significant at 1%. The independent predictor variable accounted for a variation of about 3 percent. This however, shows a low prediction of diversity climate on workplace friendship.

**TABLE 4.3.1c:**  $H_1$ : perceived value diversity will independently predict workplace friendship

Variable	F-Ratio	Significant of P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\bar{R}^2$	B	T	P
Perceived value diversity	1.422	.000	.085	.007	.002	17.798	11.583	.000

The table above showed that the independent prediction of perceived value diversity on workplace friendship was significant with  $F(1,195) = 1.422$ ;  $R = .085$ ;  $R^2 = .007$ ;  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .002$ ;  $P < 0.05$ . The result indicates that it is significant at 5%. The independent predictor variable accounted for a variation of about 2 percent. This however, shows a high prediction of perceived value diversity on workplace friendship. However, with  $P < 0.05$ , we conclude that perceived value diversity will independently predict workplace friendship.

$H_2$ : There will be a significant relationship between diversity climate and workplace friendship.

Hypothesis II was set to examine if there will be a significant relationship between diversity climate and workplace friendship. In order to examine this, the Pearson's Correlation technique was employed and the result obtained is presented below.

**TABLE 4.3.2: Showing Pearson's correlation between diversity climate and workplace friendship**

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	N	R	P	Remark
Diversity climate	19.5816	3.87212	196	-0.180	0.05	Sig.
Workplace friendship	16.0153	4.94843	196			

The result from the above table shows that the mean value of 19.5816 for diversity climate and 16.0153 for workplace friendship falls within the minimum and maximum values of 5.00 and 25.00 and 6.00 and 30.00. The result also shows a low standard deviation of 3.87212 and 4.94843.

However, based on the result from the correlation table, it indicates that correlation is significant at the 0.05 level with a 2 tailed test. This result indicates  $P < 0.1$  since  $P = 0.05$ . Hence, it is significant at 10%. Based on the outcome therefore, we conclude that there is a significant relationship between diversity climate and workplace friendship. The hypothesis is accepted

$H_3$ : There will be significant relationship between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship.

Hypothesis 3 was set to examine if there will be a significant relationship between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship. In order to examine this, the Pearson's Correlation technique was employed and the result obtained is presented below.



**TABLE4.3.5: Showing Pearson’s correlation between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship**

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	N	R	P	Remark
Perceived value diversity	18.7500	4.43803	196	-0.85	0.05	Sig.
Workplace friendship	16.0153	4.94843	196			

The result from the above table shows that the mean value of 18.7500 for perceived value diversity and 16.0153 for workplace friendship falls within the minimum and maximum values of 5.00 and 25.00 and 6.00 and 30.00. The result also shows a low standard deviation of 4.43803 and 4.94843. However, based on the result from the correlation table, it indicates that correlation is significant at the 0.05 level with a 2 tailed test. This result indicates  $P < 0.1$  since  $P = 0.05$ . Hence, it is significant at 10%. Based on the outcome therefore, we conclude that there is a significant relationship between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship. The hypothesis is accepted.

#### Concluding Remarks

This study examined the nexus between diversity and workplace friendship in the maritime sector of the Nigerian economy. Diversity is mostly defined as the ways in which persons differ from each other (Pollar & Gonzales 1994) or the distinctive characteristics of individuals (Brown, Snedeker & Sykes 1997). It can be concluded from the study conducted that diversity climate and perceived value diversity jointly and independently predicted workplace friendship. These means that the two factors used in measuring diversity were predictors of workplace friendship. This research also concludes that there was association between diversity climate and workplace friendship as well as between perceived value diversity and workplace friendship.

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