

Diversity Management: Breaking the Barriers to Achieve Industrial Sustainability in Nigerian Organizations

Longe, Olukayode (PhD)

Department of Management and Accounting, Lead City University, Ibadan
Corresponding Author. E-mail: longe.olukayode@lcu.edu.ng , Premiumkay@gmail.com

Abstract: *In today's global fast-rising business environment, dynamic organizations are embracing diversity to create inclusiveness in workplaces irrespective of sectors in nation's economy. The achievement of inclusiveness within corporate culture holds the potential to ensure industrial sustainability and guarantee positive transformation of workforce behaviours as gain of diversity management in work organizations. In Nigeria however, institutional arrangements for effective management of diversity which should bring about inclusiveness is still somehow feeble. Discriminatory and exclusion practices continue to stifle sustainable performance and debase industrial sustainability objectives in Nigerian workplaces. The main thrust of this paper, therefore, is to put into perspective the inhibitory barriers to diversity management and proffer ways of mitigating these impediments to achieve sustainable performance in Nigerian organizations. These objectives were pursued through a review of literature. The paper contends that diversity management still has a low order maturity in most Nigerian organizations and needs to move beyond this encumbrance in order to engender opportunity for industrial sustainability objectives in corporate organizations. In conclusion, the paper calls for policy measures to reinforce the practice of diversity management as a critical success factor to minimize workforce inequality and maximise industrial sustainability priorities more effectively in the Nigerian work environment.*

Keywords: Diversity Management, Inclusiveness, Performance Optimization and Industrial Sustainability

1. Introduction

With the globalisation of labour market place in the world economy, organizations have intensified their focus on the management of diversity to promote the advancement and retard starvation of productivity in workplaces. This move is imperative in order to make organizations more bearable and capable of being run in a sustainable manner that can yield their long-term viability. The major reasons for this shift are increase in the participation of women employees, involvement of people belonging to different backgrounds and multiple generations. (Gary and Sangwan, 2021). Besides, many management levels consider that they have moral duty to promote equality and likeness in the organization (Liw et al, 2022 and Moor-Barak, 2015). In this manner, diversity management actively fights discrimination and is crucial to the achievement of industrial sustainability whether in the public or private sector of any nation's economy. It is also positively associated with creativity, problem-solving skills and competency when effectively leveraged in corporate organizations.

Along these lines, through diversity management, employees' skills and competencies are synergistically brought together to tackle emerging challenges as well as unlock their full potential in ensuring the long-term survival of work organizations. In essence, diversity management plays a significant role in organizational outcomes (Yadav and Lenka, 2020).

According to Ugoani (2018), this is central to industrial sustainability, which means, corporate organizations should survive to benefit future generations. In other words, industrial sustainability in any nation's economy is a massive umbrella that covers almost everything from resources and organizational effectiveness through innovation to the offering of competitive advantage in organizations. Thus, it is a transformational path to attaining superior corporate viability and performance perpetuity in a country like Nigeria. As expected, industrial sustainability has now gained currency as an intra-organizational improvement mark for institutional changes not only in Nigeria but in other global nations. More so that, it is an investment for today and the future to expand the scope of performance and drive the narratives of diversity management for better success in work organizations.

Regrettably however, Nigerian organizations have been very torpid in response to the global pendulum of diversity management. The lack of constructive initiatives to develop and implement policies for effective leveraging of the power of diversity in Nigerian organisations, is pernicious with the conspicuously weak or non-existing institutional arrangement to potently handle diversity management in work places. This inaction has been responsible for her low order status and depressed maturity of the public sector organizations of the nation's economy. In particular, Nigerian public sector organizations are still waxing in the traditional belief system and yet to fully harness the contemporary value proposition in workplaces. As Abugo and Eno (2018) aptly put it, the contemporary belief system is marked by a general sense, that the traditional work arrangement is inadequate to address the challenges encountered in recent times. With this dimension, shifting towards industrial sustainability in the Nigerian economy would require a fundamental rethinking and replacing of the traditional work value system, with the strategic practice of diversity management. Aside this, issues of tribalism and ethnic divide which visibly have permeated the fabric of the entire Nigeria public service hindered meritocracy on the job. The public sector governance in the country has remained ineffective, unpopular and counter - productive (Ndukwe, et al, 2020).

However, in order to ensure inclusion in the face of apparent diversity, Nigeria's government has established an administrative set-up which is the Federal Character Commission (FCC) for institutionalizing diversity issues on employment matters. The performance of this machinery is still rather unprincipled as it has not in any way succeeded in achieving its set objectives. The constitutional provision of the FCC ended up creating more problems than it sets to solve, reflecting in the melting pot of allegory (George, Yusuf & Cornelius, 2017). From all indications, the Federal Character principle of diversity management in the Nigerian public sector organizations has very limited and non-sustainable benefits. The poor implementation of workplace diversity management in the Nigerian public sector such as lopsided application of policies, the quota system, catchment area and the Federal character principle have threatened the country's corporate existence (Owolabi & Tijani – Adenle, 2022). The situation in the private sector is not much better as diversity management is still liberal and voluntaristic in nature as it is yet to get to the maturity stage except in some few multinational companies in the oil and gas industry.

In effect, Dowd (2016) opined that in an environment characterized by high level of diversity, low level of inclusion and historically weak but evolving arrangement, a tempered radical change is a necessity to oppose the status quo. This is the fact of the situation in most Nigerian organizations. Nevertheless, this situation can be remedied if only, by leveraging diversity as

a faithful initiative that transcends beyond any political motive and upholds an uncompromising all and inclusive usage, where employees' differences and similarities are embraced for value creation in Nigerian work organizations. Entrenching this, will enable corporate organizations and industries in the country to attain industrial sustainability goal for a better future and provide improvement of long-term viability of business concerns in the country. Therefore, the focus of this discourse is to examine the interconnection between diversity management and industrial sustainability and their inhibitory barriers in Nigerian organizations. It starts with the introduction and then provides the conceptual meanings of diversity management and industrial sustainability followed by their hinderances in workplaces and how such impediments can be mitigated to achieve industrial sustainability in Nigeria. Lastly, the conclusion and recommendations are put forward.

2. Capturing Concepts

2.1 Diversity Management

Diversity management is a widespread corporate strategy and the concept has been variously defined by several scholars. According to Newsier and Dajnokie (2022) the term, diversity management is associated with organization's human resource management. Abugu & Eno (2018) also contended that diversity management is a standard of human resource management in contemporary organizations. As such, it is a huge value-adding managerial approach and a comprehensive process of creating an inclusive workplace environment to foster workforce commitment and diminish increased risk of conflict in work relations. From the human resource management perspective, diversity management is used to attract, retain and effectively manage the workplace in order to contribute to organizational performance (Hordofa 2022, Mulu & Zewdie, 2021). To this end, the managerial strategy has unmasked itself as a factor of performance sustainability devoid of selective effects which enables management to view employees holistically as assets in organizations. Thus, in the workplace, diversity management is the extent to which every employee is treated equally irrespective of their demography or differences and this ultimately strengthens inclusiveness (Garcia-Rodriquez et al, 2020).

According to Inegbedion, et al, (2020), diversity management seeks to capture the heterogeneity of groups or people and explore the same for the benefit of the group in particular and the society at large. Along this perception, it is now acknowledged as an organisational strategy of recognizing the wide variety of qualities possessed by people within the workplace. As an integral aspect of good corporate practice, diversity management is considered a novel approach of fair treatment aimed at creating the much-needed stimulus for resolving employees' job-related issues associated with equality and justice in organizations. Employees are more benefited from diversity initiatives when the workplace is inclusive than when they are discriminated against (Joubert, 2016). Indeed, diversity management enables diverse workforce to perform full potential in an equitable environment where no one has an advantage or disadvantage (Onday, 2016). Basically, it is now majorly seen as a force driving productivity and propelling the path for organizational stability and viability. As a result, diversity management aims to build and sustain a supportive work climate in which all employees similarities and differences are respected and allowed them to achieve their full potentials and contribute to organizational strategic objectives (Krith and Ramesh, 2021).

For the purpose of this paper, however, the notion of diversity management is construed as a systematic approach of altering the key organizational attributes that create rigidities in corporate behaviours and accepting the conscious utilization of differences and similarities of workforce to maximize their inherent qualities for the accomplishment of industrial sustainability objectives in workplaces.

2.2 Industrial Sustainability

The concept of industrial sustainability is rather new and the term has clusters of meaning but it is used mainly in reference to performance paradigm. This simply implies that the concept of industrial sustainability operates on the principle of workplace needs and corporate goals optimization both in the short, medium and long terms continuity of workplaces. Along this line, Ugoani (2018) describes industrial sustainability to mean that, the organization while satisfying the interest and expectation of the present generation should not be run to the extent of compromising the interest of the future generations. This definition corresponds to the belief that without major positive changes on how an organization is run, it will suffer irreparable depletion of growth and development. As such, the concept of industrial sustainability translates into the optimisation of performance in today's organizations with tomorrow's workforce in mind and the capacity to maintain growth and development continuity overtime. In this regard, it is a business goal and an outcome of competitive advantage in corporate organizations. Nowadays, industrial sustainability is converted to a part of a business model all around the world (Antolin-Lopez et al 2016). It is also directed to bring about advancement that meets the needs of the present generation in workplaces, without doing away with the ability of the forthcoming generation. The intention is that organizational practices must be altered to become compatible on the long-run with the protection of the environment and well-being of the people.

In this sense, industrial sustainability is seen as a moving target which suggests that organizational performance should be kept on going and on continuous basis without compromising the desirable state for the future generation. This suggests that its emphasis is on intergeneration equity. Therefore, the concept as fathomed in this paper, is the end state of the transformational process where corporate organizations, as a part of the larger society, actively and continuously contribute to socio-economic and environmental performance improvement without compromising the interest of the future generation. Hence, it is a phenomenon that endures overtime with performance perpetuity, if effectively leveraged with a strategic business driven tool, like diversity management, devoid of any inhibitory barriers in work organizations.

2.3 Barriers to Diversity Management in Nigerian Organizations

Today, Nigerian organizations most especially in the public sector of the nation's economy are still trapped in a web of chronic diversity problems creating daunting challenges of industrial sustainability accomplishment. These barriers are well alive and enwrapped in the political potency and controversy surrounding diversity issues in the country. As a result, many organizations are encountering more than a few challenges as they have sought to address the varieties of issues, opportunities and problems that their increasingly diverse workforce have created (Edeh, Nwakamma & Anigbata, 2017). Many of these baneful barriers and misunderstandings are also caused by management themselves, creating dissatisfaction and

turmoil that result into dampened employee morale, stifling workforce performance in organizations. Ann and Ukepere (2014) gave manifestations such as inaccurate stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination as challenges of effective diversity management which finally results in a scarification of competency and quality in workplaces. In the workplace, stereotypes which are based on very limited information about others lead to greater problems when fairness, impartiality and uprightness are not applied on the same level to all members of a group, creating unnecessary discrimination in corporate organisations. Relatedly, unequal and insufficient knowledge of employees create confusion in working relationship, which affects teamwork, damage organization's reputation and retard the ability to attract diverse talent into corporate organizations.

Literature has further indicated that sexism and discrimination (Wengrzn, 2015) communication and resistance to change (Greenberg, 2015) leadership skill gap and prioritization dilution (Fin, 2015) are dysfunctional barriers typical of Nigerian work organizations. These impediments are militating against the effectiveness and progress of diversity management in organizations in the country. They have also created encumbrances in workplaces as they require extra efforts of management to adapt regular employees to the set standard of operational efficiency in Nigerian workplaces. Furthermore, Bah (2015) reiterated issues of communication barrier, lack of trust, poor training and non-diversity in hiring, which lowered performance efficiency and loyalty of employees in organizations.

These identified factors serve as inhibitory dynamics of diversity management in the push to achieve industrial sustainability in Nigerian organizations. Communication barriers lead to problems in organizations when people from different background are hired, and lead to misunderstanding and decrease in productivity (Ogunbameru, 2018). Managing workforce and diversity bargaining, analyzing business opportunities and threats, all require effective communication. In other words, communication is the bind that keep organizations alive (Alabi & Adenuga, 2018). The ability to communicate clearly and accurately is one of the most valued skills in any business environment. Diverse talent and competency are of no practical value unless communication is effective. In very much the same way, negative thoughts and prejudice are serious barriers to diversity management, because they can harm working relationship, damage morale and workforce productivity. Prejudice is an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when not conceived logically and maturedly. It shows up during hiring process, promotion exercise, or during employee interaction in the workplace (Hordofa, 2022). All these inhibitive factors are not only common, but are visible manifestations in Nigerian organizations.

2.4 Breaking the Barriers to achieve Industrial Sustainability

Diversity management is a policy approach whereby organizations are urged to value the differences and similarities of the workforce in order to achieve corporate success. As such, breaking its barriers are crucial to the accomplishment of industrial sustainability in Nigerian workplaces. From this point of view, diversity management must ensure the cultivation of an inclusive work environment and empowerment of the workforce. The inhibitory barriers which prevent resource efficiency and ensures the right attitude to fix organizational deficiency must be mitigated in order to reflect diverse interests and dislodge the structured antagonism prevalent in employment relationship in Nigerian organizations. This makes it imperative, why, today's organizations need to recognize and manage diversity effectively (Hordofa,

2022). Overcoming the barriers of diversity management in Nigerian organizations must thus involve, recognizing that they exist and being sensitive to their prevention in work organizations.

From this line of perception, managing diversity effectively seems to have much promise as a change process that can spur the entire organization to drive the achievement of corporate success. Accomplishing this feat, requires the involvement of top management, creating a new vision and encouraging a culture of mutual tolerance and respect if diversity management is to be put into productive use in enhancing work efficiency and productivity in Nigerian organizations. Inevitably, it is through the collective efforts of the diverse workforce that organizations can grow and achieve the continuity of the optimal level of sustainability performance in Nigerian workplaces. Discriminatory practices setting encumbrance to the hiring and utilization of available talents from different background to create an inclusive work environment must be tackled and redressed. Therefore, management must show personal emotion towards the necessary stance to reverse discrimination which is the opposite of excellence that leads to strong resistance, creating disharmonious relationship in organizations (Atyah, 2016).

Breaking the barriers of diversity management will further require the need for value re-orientation and attitudinal change in most Nigerian organizations which should be considered as very crucial to all stakeholders. As such, willingness to communicate the motive of the novel managerial approach should be encouraged and this could easily be achieved through the creation of diversity council to assist in the building of inclusive work environment, advising on diversity issues and providing feedback to management. Also sexism and gender discrimination based on management perception of appropriate work roles and sex-type expectations in organizations should be de-emphasized. In Nigeria, corporate and business organizations need to value the diversity of women experience to contribute actively to the achievement of sustainability performance in workplaces. This is because women have the unique feminist approach and leadership traits of open-mindedness and inclusiveness to collaborate with men to drive the achievement of industrial sustainability. The marginalization of women in Nigerian organizations which is an outcome of an unfavorable and embedded male centered structure tends to limit the scope open to them in their aspirations for top leadership position and to contribute effectively to decision making and policy in the workplace. This is very detrimental to the accomplishment of industrial sustainability in Nigerian work environment.

Specifically, a reorientation strategy is necessary for the achievement of industrial sustainability in Nigerian organizations and this would no doubt require a radical rethink method in implementation to fashion out a more inclusive workplace culture and diminish the uncertainty the future holds for its attainment in workplaces. Also, overcoming the barriers, will involve the recognition of the existence of the various workforce diversity challenges in work-organizations. In this connection, the commitment of top management and line managers are required to ensure good workforce morale and warm working climate to optimize sustainability performance. In contrast to the present reality in Nigerian organizations, especially in the public sector, care selection, orientation and support are necessary for employees to adapt to the new situation. This connotes the need for supportive political climate

and humanistic transformational leadership that can bring to bear, real equitable, inclusive and diverse representation in Nigerian workplaces to ensure a break through achievement of industrial sustainability. The smooth foray in Nigerian organizations is not only in the implementation of diversity management but in making it more effective to provide immensurable dimension of quality performance which will capture the sustainability of bottom line growth in Nigerian organizations.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, efforts have been made to emphasize the motive of diversity management as fostering of a positive work environment in order to make organizations more functional at achieving fairness and equity without compromising sustainability performance in workplaces. As a natural extension of human resource management practice, the managerial approach must be leveraged as a change initiative and value adding strategy to increase the competencies of employees in work organizations. This will make work organizations more efficient in the use of labour, capital, technology and resources to achieve dramatic improvement in total corporate sustainability. In this respect, workforce diversity management must ensure greater openness and participation to give the necessary and required support to organizational members in achieving sustainable work performance. Indeed, there is now ample evidence to suggest that effective diversity management positively drives the achievement of industrial sustainability. This position necessitates management to think about value consistency and goal achievement within the organization as an important aspect of managing diversity to break the barriers and remove encumbrances of attaining industrial sustainability in Nigerian organizations.

4. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing conclusion, the paper suggests that diversity management should be made a core organizational objective and aligned with corporate values in order to achieve the goal of industrial sustainability in Nigerian work places. Management must adopt cross-cultural approach to put in place working conditions which will enhance workforce diversity especially in the formulation of strategies to drive the attainment of industrial sustainability. By the same token, management must promote fairness and justice using collaborative approach in resolving ensuing conflicts with considerations and inputs from all parties involved in the workplace. These are in addition to the institutionalization of effective and open communication which must be encouraged at all levels of the organizational structure and made to flow in all directions of the organization. Most importantly, governance of public and organizational policies must be effective to address issues of inclusiveness and place premium on learning and development opportunities to emphasize proper communication, reduce inaccurate stereotypes and overcome resistance to change which are the inhibitive barriers to diversity management in Nigerian organizations. There is also the need to recognize the interconnectedness between men and women and acknowledge gender equity as an irredeemable factor for the attainment of industrial sustainability in Nigerian organizations. Under the current Nigerian's legislative system, the constitutional provision setting up the Federal Character Commission responsible of the promotion for ensuring diversity particularly in Nigerian public sector organizations needs to be revisited and made more effective to encourage meritocracy in the country. Fundamental policies with potent legislative enactment that will ensure the effectiveness of diversity management should be formulated and implemented to achieve industrial sustainability objectives in Nigerian workplaces.

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