

Diversity Management and Ethnic Conflict in Organizations in Nigeria: A Study of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This work examined the issue of diversity management and ethnic conflict at Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. The purpose was to investigate if ethnic conflict exists in this university and how it is handled. The study adopted the Equity Theory. A sample size of 45 was drawn. The focus group, indebt interview and questionnaire were adopted in the selection of respondents. Four objectives and corresponding four research questions were raised in the study. Data that addressed the research questions were analyzed using descriptive method. The findings of the study include i. Presence of Ethnic Conflict, ii. It was also established that ethnic conflict reduces employee productivity and also affects workers moral. iii. it also leads to high labour turnover in the institution, iv. it leads to absenteeism and also affects workers' psychology. Based on these findings the study made the following recommendations that i. Regular sensitization of Human Resource Management Personnel of public and private organizations on the need to ensure equal opportunities for all workers irrespective of their ethnic background. This will be better appreciated if the Human Resource Management team embraces the concept of diversity in work organizations and engaged managers related to this. ii. There should be an enactment of laws that will stipulate punishment or penalties for any organization or worker that discriminates via policies and practices or limit the rights of an individual because of ethnicity. iii. There should be a diversity department where issues of diversity will be handled. This department must and should be headed by diversity managers who

have undergone training on diversity matters. iv. Any staff found of being guilty of discriminating against a colleague because of ethnic differences must be punished for that (Brown., Kozlowski and Hattrup, 1996).

Key words: Diversity; Management; Ethnicity; Diversity management; Conflict and conflict management

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, in most organizations human resource management activities remains avital aspect of the functioning of the organizations and the management. Virtually almost all modern organizations are faced with certain challenges. Example of such challenges is the challenge of managing its workers. The challenges of employees go beyond recruitment, placement, labour turnover, conflicts in workplace, etc. In organizations, employees do not have the same background or entity however are characterised by obvious difference, such race, ethnicity, gender, age, language, religious (faith) beliefs, educational background, marital status, physical disability, skills, etc. In all, these contribute to the arrays or diversity and complexity of workplaces and their population which include management, worker/ employees, and customers. Particularly, cultural diversity means that organizations should compete various forms of cultures of its employees, and should be keen to put appropriate human resource policies to benefit from the advantages of the workforce, this will reduce the conflicts that are related with diversity in organizations. The concept of organizational diversity should be viewed as a

vital substance in human resource management (HRM), for that reason, it has inspired both academic and business expertise to examine the factors which brought about it and the management strategy on how it could be handled.

At this juncture, it is essential to bring to the fore organizational diversity as an increasing idea in organizational studies, which straddles Sociology of Workplace, Industrial Relations, and Personnel Management for the study to be put in analytical perspective.

According to (Kossek & Lobel, 1996), organizational diversity (OD) covers variety of differences in ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, function, ability, disability, religion, language, lifestyle among employees working in an organization. Despite the fact that diversities are part of employees or the profile of personnel in organizations. There is the presence of contrary opinions about it among researchers or scholars. Moreover, diversity in work organizations comprise of more than employees' diverse demographic backgrounds, it involves dissimilarities in culture and intellectual capability. In order for any organizations to accomplish its goals, it must look beyond ethnic and demographic diversity (Leonard & Swapp, 1999).

Diversity Management is the systematic and planned commitment which the organization use to recruit and retain workers from and with diverse backgrounds and capabilities. This action or event is primarily located around the management of human resource training and the field of development of organizations (Better-Reed & Moore, 1992; Thomas, 1992). From the context of this study, diversity management is seen as the total outcome of human resource management sub-systems, such as recruitment, reward, performance appraisal, employee development and individual managerial behaviours in delivering competitive advantage through leadership and teamwork. A very important and significant element in an organization to strive to success is the capacity to draw, motivate and retain talented employees with different backgrounds and expectations and to build them into a focused and dedicated workforce (Maier, 2005). Ordinarily, the all-inclusive backgrounds of employees in an organization presents challenges for the organization, also, it offers motivating opportunity of binding the human potential to a strong competitive advantage.

In recent times, the notion "Diversity" as is applied is beyond skin-color, gender etc. It involves several differences including religious affiliation, age, disability status, sexual orientation, economic class, educational background, and lifestyle in addition to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. A very big task which human resource personnel face is the challenge of dealing with the expectations of employees that come from different backgrounds. Based on this, human resource personnel need to have an articulated framework on human resource

strategy that is aimed to bring talent in organizations (Jones, 1999).

Scholars like Ely and Thomas (2001); Ibraarra (1993); Kanter (1997); Tajfel (1982); are of the view that diversity destroys consistency, stimulate resentment, reduces communications, lead to discord, and promote distrust and all these weaken workers efficiency and effectiveness. Meanwhile Cox and Blake (1991) Illes and Hayers (1997); Richard and Shelor (2002) maintain that if diversity is well managed, it could improve creativity which would eventually increase the commitment, job satisfaction with customers and other clients. Various views among intellectuals in terms of advantages and disadvantages of organizational diversity put responsibility on academic especially in Sociology of Industry, Formal Organization to promote studies and programmes on conflict management in organization. This study concentrates on Diversity Management and Ethnic Conflict in Organizations in Nigeria. A Study of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. It looks at how ethnic differences in this institution causes rancour, discrimination, friction and all other vices that could lead to low productivity, absenteeism, etc.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In contemporary times in Nigeria, ethnicity has eaten deep into the marrow of the society especially in organizations. Multiplicity in ethnic diversity has not and does not help the growth of any nation or organization. Rather it destroys any institution, organization or environment where it is practiced. Ethnicity which is sometimes referred as tribalism has been a major factor that contributes to conflicts in most organizations in Nigeria. It is no longer a story or hidden fact that the issue of ethnicity is made so obvious that even at the point of seeking employment in most organizations in Nigeria, your state of origin and where you come from is put at the forefront. Most employers do not worry so much about the experience, qualification, ability, capability to perform the task which is advertised. To most employers, once a candidate is from the same tribe, ethnic background or can speak the same language, that candidate is the right person for the job. It has even gotten to the extent that when you are from the same state and not from the same tribe the qualified candidate would not be considered for the job. Based on this, employees find it difficult to work as a team in most organizations especially when they discover that they are not from the same ethnic background or speak the same language. In most of such organizations where ethnic rivalries abound, comments like 'this is not your state' or 'go to your place' are usually common.

Again, in such organizations and institutions, workers are always in different cartel. Gossips, hatred, backbiting, jealousy, acrimony, hostility, antagonism

just to mention but a few are usually what is commonly found. Organizations, where ethnicity is considered more important than the individual performance, can never stand the test of time. Based on existing literature, Organizational Diversity issues engender paradoxical situations. On the side of its disadvantages, diversity is a cause of misunderstanding, suspicion, and conflict in the workforce that can result in absenteeism, poor quality production, low morale, loss of competitiveness and high attrition rate (Nigel, 2002). Within an organization, a serious problem arises with reverence of the contradictory situations, in such a way that if the differences or diversities in organizations are not well managed, it could result in discriminations, acrimony among the workforce, and a massive defeat of organizational goals and values. It has been observed particularly in some organizations in Nigeria, such Delta State University, Abraka that different forms of discrimination occurs in this institution due to differences in ethnicity, race, gender, religion, etc., which sometimes lead to loose of jobs, subtle forms of queries, and lack of interest to perform adequately to the growth of the organization by the employee.

Human resource managers face serious challenges and need certain changes to manage organizational conflicts. The changes needed are particularly difficult (Porter, 1995; Schein, 1996; Zane, 2002), for example, coping with these challenges take management serious commitment, skilled training and range of organizational knowledge, human resource possesses, including a shared understanding that managing diversity is not a problem to be solved but an ongoing and lengthy process. All of these are needed to sustain people's willingness to work together when they do not share values, experiences, culture, and methods of deducing the meaning and solving problems (Zane, 2002).

As observed by Bassett-Jones, (2005); Cox, (2001); Galagan (1993); Moore, (1999); applying diversity in organization or workplace is not an easy task. First of all, workers prefer working in similar groups. Secondly, employees and the organizations they form, usually try to resist changes. Having a successful diversity management human resource managers need to have leadership skills, change management, organizational development, communication skills, measurement, and assessment skills. These broad-based skills might be largely beneficial to the success of any business initiative which may be lacking in several organizations. When an organization changes, it is also a way of accepting new changes in the environment where the organization is situated for the survival of such organization. This simply means that the old way of doing things no longer work in the global age. Most managers face serious challenges in organizations and may not be able to manage their employees to adapt to the changes brought about by the new upsurge of globalization.

In recent times, there have been numerous debates on the issue of low productivity in the workplace which

is defined as the organization's inability to achieve its maximum capacity. It is important to know that every employer yearns to be as productive as possible, through dedicated staff. According to managerial theorists, productivity is a very important issue in any organization. Some of the causes of low productivity in the workplace include diversity issues that are, discriminating against people in one way or the other, absenteeism by employees, the inability to have a fully trained staff and employee morale being of a low standard.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between diversity and ethnic conflict in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria.

The objectives of the study are:

- a) to investigate if there is any form of ethnic conflict in Delta State University, Abraka.
- b) to investigate the extent to which diversity management and ethnic conflict affect workers' productivity in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.
- c) To highlight the effects of ethnic conflict on workers' performance in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.
- d) to explore the extent to which ethnic conflict affects employees' morale in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- a) is there any form of ethnic conflict in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State?
- b) to what extent do ethnic conflict affects workers' productivity in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State?
- c) what are the effects of ethnic conflict on workers' performance in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State?
- d) how has ethnic conflict affect employees' morale in Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State?.

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study will be used as a major tool in solving ethnic conflicts in organizations in Nigeria.

This study made important contributions in the following areas:

- (i) Theoretical Significance
- (ii) Practical/Policy Significance

THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Theoretically, there is no research work done as it relates to ethnic conflicts and organizational diversity in Nigeria. This is evidenced by a lack of already written and documented research works in the library, E-mail library,

etc. There is no comprehensive documented study on ethnic conflict and diversity in organizations.

Practical / Policy Significance

The findings of this study shall benefit the various groups or policy-making bodies that are either directly or indirectly responsible for recruitment in work organizations. Such bodies are the International Labour Organization (ILO), Labour Unions, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Employment Agencies, Personnel Managers, Human Resource Managers and Owners/Directors of Organization etc.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study concentrated on Ethnic Conflict and Organizational Diversity in Nigeria: A study of Delta State Universities, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. As it is and has always been there is hardly any research work without limitations. Thus, in the course of carrying out this research work, the following problems were encountered; the researcher was frustrated in various endeavor to look for information or get existing literature/materials from libraries within and outside her environment; bureaucratic bottleneck in most work organizations peculiar to Nigeria; wrong insinuations and skeptics about perceived outcome of the study. Nevertheless, after much effort at educating the people on the need and purpose of the study, we got helpful responses, that facilitated data collection; and the study got the necessary results.

Theoretical Framework

The Equity Theory of John Stacey Adams was adopted for this study. This theory is based on the assumption of fair treatment and the ways in which it helps to motivate workers. It takes account of inputs and outputs in the work environment, and their effect on workers motivation. In this theory, inputs such as fair treatment and benefits help to motivate people, resulting in improved outputs, while inputs such as unfair treatment are likely to result in outputs of de-motivation and poor performance. This theory is often effective in a unionized environment, where fair treatment and equity are highly rated. This theory was used to explain the problems of ethnic conflict and organizational diversity in Organizations: Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State. Employment Equity also often referred to as Equal Employment Practices, call for businesses and organizations to hire and promote candidates that are best qualified for a position, regardless of factors such as ethnicity, gender, disability, and religion. It also calls for promoting and terminating of employees appointment in a way that does not take into account their membership in a class of individuals protected from discrimination by law.

This theory is relevant to this study because it includes all employees irrespective of ethnicity, gender, religion and also fosters motivation among employees. A principle

of Workplace Equity dictates that employees must be treated fairly in all employment decisions, without regard to their ethnicity, gender, color, race or other personal differences (Cynthia, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This section examined the methods that were used in gathering data for this work. Different approaches or methods are adopted in the quest for finding answers or solutions to problems in social research. The researchers' understanding of the problem at hand is what influences the choice of methods used provided it is applied logically and it serves the purpose for which it is used. Aware of the fact that conflict and organizational diversity are our major concern, methods applied in this work was discussed under the following divisions; Study Design, Source of Information, Study Area, Scope of Study, Study Population, Method of Data Collection, Method of Data Analysis and Limitations of the Study.

Research Design

This work made use of both survey and exploratory type of research design. The survey method enabled the researcher to collect data through Questionnaires, In-depth Interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This method also helped the researcher to describe and understand the phenomenon as it is. The method specifically avails the researcher the opportunity to come face to face with most of the respondents. This also affords the researcher to have a sense of empirical data concerning the sensitive nature of conflict and organizational diversity especially as it affects the institution studied. The Exploratory method was also adopted because it allowed the consideration of several views on the subject matter.

The population of the Study

The population of the study includes employees, management staff, academic staff, the non-academic staff of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.

SOURCES OF DATA

Primary and Secondary Sources

Information for this study was obtained through both Primary and Secondary Sources. The Primary Sources of Data include the In-depth Interview (IDI), the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Questionnaire method, while the Secondary Sources include Documentary Data such as Literatures (books), Internet materials and related documents.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher made use of the following methods of data collection; In-depth Interview (IDI), Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Questionnaires.

Method of Data Analysis

Since Data for this study was mainly In-depth Interviews (IDI), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Questionnaire, transcribe were used with significant statements written strictly to capture social reality. The method used to analyze the data for this work was simply descriptive.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

Data got from the field was presented and analyzed here. Forty-five (45) questionnaires were administered to respondents of Delta State University, Abraka and a total of 40 were filled and returned. The data derived from the questionnaire were analyzed using simple percentages, charts, In-depth Interviews.

Data Presentation

Table 1
Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaires

Organization	No. of Questionnaire Distributed	No of Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage of Retrieval in each organization
Delta State University, Abraka	45	40	89
Total	45	40	89

Source: Researcher's Survey Data, 2019.

The sample Table 1 was drawn from the population in the study area. While the percentage of questionnaires retrieved from Delta State University, Abraka was 89%. This significant retrieval of an average of 89% provides elaborate data with the opportunity for good analysis and inferences for this research study.

Question 1

Table 2
Extent of Ethnic Conflict

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	78
No	5	12
Total	40	100

Source: Researcher's Survey Data, 2019.

Table 2 indicates that 35 respondents representing 78% stated that there have been cases of ethnic conflict in the organization, while 5 respondents representing 12% had a contrary opinion. The appreciable responses of those who are in the affirmative show that there is a diverse form of ethnic conflict or rivalry in the institution.

Has there been any form of ethnic conflict in your institution?

(a) Yes (b) No

If your answer above is Yes, please explain

I have witnessed not less than five cases in my institution where workers were on a log ahead because of ethnic rivalry. Apart from that, sometimes ago I was told by a fellow worker in my institution that I should go to my state, that we have come to their state to take their jobs (IDI, Male, 42 Years).

Similarly, another staff of this university complained of the several verbal harassment he has received from his colleagues just because he is not from the same state as him. That the colleagues from that state will always remind the non-indigence to remember that they are in a strange land. (IDI, Male, 38 Years).

The above-mentioned claims by the respondent are evident to prove that ethnic conflicts exist in the institution.

Since you started working in this institution, how many ethnic conflicts have you heard or observed?

(a) 1; (b) 2; (c) 3; (d) 4; (e) 5

If you have heard or observed any form of ethnic conflict, how was it resolved?

Yes, Ma. I have observed 3 but I can only say what I know about how two of them were resolved. I know of one that happened between two staff was settled quietly by a more senior colleague in the institution. The other one was handled by a lecturer who saw when these two people had issues and invited them and they both opened up. To the amazement of one of them, the other person was talking about tribe and alleged that the other of the colleague is always speaking her tribal language in the office. Based on that, she was not comfortable with her. For that reason, the lecturer who tried to settle the two of them and who is well-grounded on diversity issues advised them to always speak the official language which is the English language during working hours to avoid any form of suspicion (Focused Group Discussion, Male, 36).

To what extent does ethnic conflict affect workers' productivity in Delta State University, Abraka?

The above question was answered by a respondent as follows

As staff working in this university, I have observed that instead of the institution to continue to have high productivity, productivity continue to reduce. On my own, I tried to find out from colleagues if I was the only one who has noticed the low productivity by workers compared to how it used to be. The outcome and responses I got were alarming. The majority of the workers almost shared the same view. Some said they are no longer happy, that the rate at which other workers keep reminding them that they are not from this place was embarrassing to them. Some others said that one cannot put his or her best in an organization whereby others are always reminding them to go their place (IDI, Female, 35).

What are the effects of ethnic conflict on workers' performance in Delta State University, Abraka?

Ma, the effect of ethnic conflict on workers' performance cannot be underestimated. First of all, if a worker is not happy in his or her workplace as a result of discrimination arising from ethnic conflict, that staff or employee can never put her best in such an organization. Certainly, that will affect his or her performance. I once had an encounter

with a staff in my institution. When the matter was investigated unofficially by myself and one of my friends working in the institution, the only thing the staff who we had the issue with said was that this institution has been dominated by non-indigence (IDI, Female, 38).

If you think ethnic conflict can affect workers' morale, please state

- a. It can lead to absenteeism among staff
- b. Workers psychology can be affected

Discussion of Findings

This study has got the following findings that are:

Presence of Ethnic Conflict

The finding that there is the presence of ethnic conflict in this institution is a significant fact

comparing it with the percentage of respondents that acclaimed that ethnic conflict exists in the

institution. The responses provided by the respondents in relation to the presence of ethnic

conflict and evidence of cases of ethnic conflict in the institution established that. Furthermore, it

was also established that ethnic conflict reduces employee productivity and also affects workers

moral. Apart from the fact that it affects their morale, it also leads to low turnover in the institution, it leads to absenteeism and also affects workers psychology. Which in turn affect the overall production of workers in the institution.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

The aim of this study is to draw the attention of diversity managers, human resource managers, owners of organizations on the extremely negative effects and consequences that ethnic conflict brings to every organization or institution where it is practiced and the need to correct this ugly trend because it is capable of causing serious damages to the organization. Ethnic conflict does not only affect the workers of industries, but it also affects the growth of any industry where it is found. The study revealed that there is ethnic conflict in Delta State University, Abraka. This affects the morale, productivity, and performance of employees in this institution. The study recommends that there should be a diversity department managed by diversity managers who are trained on diversity issues to handle any case of conflict-related to any form of diversity. It also recommends that any worker or staff found or guilty on the issue of discrimination because of somebody's affiliation to a particular ethnic group must seriously be punished for it. There must be guiding principles to make sure that all staff should work in a friendly environment free from any form of conflict.

The work adopted the Equity Theory of John Stacey Adams. This theory is based on the assumption of fair treatment and how it helps to motivate workers. It takes account of inputs and outputs in the work environment, and their effect on workers' motivation. In the theory, inputs such as fair treatment and benefits help to motivate people, resulting in improved outputs, while inputs such as unfair treatment are likely to result in outputs of demotivation and poor performance. This theory is often effective in a unionized environment, where fair treatment and equity are highly rated. This theory was considered appropriate to explain the problems of ethnic conflict and diversity in the Organizations: Delta State University, Abraka. This theory is relevant to this study because it includes all employees irrespective of ethnic background, gender, religion and also fosters motivation among employees. A principle of Workplace Equity dictates that employees must be treated fairly in all employment decisions, without regard to their ethnicity, gender, color, race or other personal differences Cynthia (2007). The methodology in this study captures the research design; the design used for this study was the survey research design. The population of the study includes; the Human Resource Managers, Manager, academic and non-academic staff at Delta State University, Abraka.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study analyzed Diversity Management and Ethnic Conflict in Organizations in Nigeria, A Study of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. The outcome of the study is consistent with profound views about the discriminatory practices and organizational conflict that is prevalence in the Nigeria work organizations, with reference to Delta State University, Abraka, because of the differences in ethnicity in the institution and Nigerian Society at large and as it relates to work organizations. The Equity Theory of John Stacey Adams was adopted for this study. The study made open the fact that, Diversity Management and Ethnic Conflict in Organizations in Delta State University Abraka, is one of the major reasons for conflicts in the institution. Similarly, that majority of the staff members have been involved in one conflicts situation at a point in time as staff of the University.

The work also revealed that with the level of ethnic conflict in Delta State University Abraka, most staff are not happy because of the rate of ethnicity that occurs there.

Recommendations

Based on the summary of the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made

- Regular sensitization of Human Resource Management Personnel of public and private organizations on the need to ensure equal opportunities for all workers irrespective of ethnic background. This will be better

appreciated if the Human Resource Management team embraces the concept of diversity in work organizations and engaged managers related to this.

- There should be an enactment of laws that will prescribe penalties for any organization that discriminates via policies and practices or limit the rights of individual because of ethnicity or their cultural and ethnic background.

- There should be a diversity department where issues of diversity will be handled. This department must and should be headed by diversity managers who have undergone training on diversity matters.

- Any staff found or guilty of discriminating against a colleague because of ethnic differences must be punished for that.

Contributions to Knowledge

The study made the following contributions to knowledge

- It provides records to the extent to which ethnic conflict to employment.

- It provides a guide for human resource managers, owners of organizations on how to address issues of ethnic conflict.

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