

MANAGING CULTURAL CONVERGENCE OF MULTIFARIOUSITY IN FIRMS.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2022.4611>

IJMSSSR 2023

VOLUME 5

ISSUE 3 MAY – JUNE

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

Abstract: This paper focused on the management of cultural convergence in a culturally multifarious contextual work environment. With a population of over two hundred million people, Nigeria presents a sizable opportunity for employers seeking personnel that reflect a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. Managing a multicultural workforce should involve devising strategies for encouraging participation from a wide range of personnel. When people go to work, they often carry their entire dispositions with them. The cultural origins of persons often train them to display particular behaviours at work. However, the culture of the firm should be a melting pot and the overriding decider that guides the actions of workers while at work irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. For businesses to operate at their full potential, it is important to understand how to effectively manage a workforce that includes such a vast array of contexts and points of view. This work contributes to the evolution of novel work behaviours from persons of ostensibly dissimilar backgrounds to assume similarity in their workplace behavioural outcomes through cultural convergence for the success of organisations.

Keywords: behaviour, discrimination, exclusion, inequity, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The multitudinous array of the diverse constituents of Nigeria's population typically illustrates the need for harnessing potentials for the enhancement of the apparent and real benefits accruing from their likely contributions. Many productive ventures seem inundated by the wide range of backgrounds and experiences persons possess and are willing to bring to the workplace. The compositional breakdown of the diversified characteristics shows various overt variances such as in gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and age as well as the more covert variations such as attitudes, dispositions and values (Godfrey, et al., 2020; Singh & Babbar, 2020). Despite the huge supposable benefits, the best is yet to be obtained from employees to the benefit of the firms. The underutilised capacities of the staff may not be due to their technical abilities but to the improper management of multifarious characteristics or the firm's inability to evolve a dominant workplace cultural convergence that will de-emphasize external macro socio-cultural variations. Persons are influenced by the various dimensions of their diverse personal make-ups and will come to work with the raw exhibition of the various behavioural displays of such unique dispositions (LeFevre-Levy, et al., 2023). It thus behoves the firms to evolve a unifying and harmonising melting pot that will be the defining factor in the behaviours exhibited in the firm which must be in line with organisational goals. Multifariousity in firms is the tendency of firms to have a workforce that is diverse in several dimensions. It is important that in organisations, multifariousity is looked at as a natural phenomenon consisting of useful elements of inestimable value which could be leveraged for the enhancement of firms' processes for success. Multifariousity, which some authors regard as diversity has been variously defined to mean various dimensions of differences and identities of humanity and socio-culture as well as perspective and perception which should be understood and appreciated (Ayyala, et al.,2022; Cletus, et al.,2018; Jiang, et al.,2022). Even though Multifariousity certainly takes into consideration the uniquely dispersed characteristics of each person, it also takes into account the commonalities between them. In as much as individual actions at work may be based on the circumstantial influences of their backgrounds, one should not lose sight of the prevailing influence of the prevailing culture in the workplace. Workplace cultural convergence plays an important role in setting an internal tone of cordiality as well as behaviour moderation and modification within the firm. Cultural convergence is a deliberate creation by the workplace to create work styles and social practices which employees

will have to adapt. This has also been seen as a habitual occurrence that applies to organisations and spells out specific shared ideologies and philosophies, beliefs, values norms and attitudes that unite members of the organisation (Isensee, et al., 2020; Joseph & Kibera, 2019; Paais, & Pattiruhu, 2020).

This work contributes to studies of the management of cultural convergence in workplaces as a corporate strategy in culturally multifarious contexts to evolve similarity in workplace behavioural outcomes from persons with apparently dissimilar ethnocultural and socio-religious perspectives and dispositions.

Managing Workplace Cultural Convergence

This work hinges on the theory of convergent evolution (Darwin, 1859; Owen, 1842). This genetic theory confirms that species adaptation of similar characteristics and adoption of analogous structures are contingent upon the occupation of similar ecological niches and under similar pressures. Gabora (2013) opines that “convergent evolution occurs when organisms that are not closely related evolve traits that are similar, or analogous, as an adaptive response to similar environmental pressures”. Drawing from the theoretical underpinning, workplace cultural convergence could be defined as a workplace situation where unrelated and dissimilar persons could under similar work contextual milieu develop outwardly indistinguishable traits and attributes. It thus becomes expedient that there is a prevailing workplace cultural convergence that will help businesses and their staff better solves problems and increase production. In many organisations, assessing employee performance is a continuous procedure and a major determinant and indicator of success. Business simulation studies indicated that employees were more likely to put people of different origins together if they worked in an atmosphere that emphasized collaboration and shared goals (Graham, et al, 2022). As the employees' focus shifted toward their common membership in the organisation, there is a tendency to pay less attention to the factors that set them apart, such as their demographic makeup. The culture of an organisation or business unit may influence the extent to which people from diverse demographic groups work together. This is achieved by emphasizing the common experience of belonging to the organisation as the only group. Peers embrace individuals who stick to the group's established standards and reject those who break with them. The focus placed on individual initiative via a viz collective effort in the workplace may determine how tasks are completed. Those who identify as individualists value independence and strive to create communities where members are valued for their contributions and success is determined purely by their standards. Members of a collectivist society value and are rewarded for their contributions to the collective effort to fulfil the society's stated goals (Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2019). It seems to reason, for instance, that cooperation rates will be higher in communities that reward teamwork over the lone initiative. Cultural cues that promote teamwork can have a profound effect; however, their results may vary from person to person.

Leveraging on extant legislation

Several companies in Nigeria have procedures in place to prevent insensitivity, bias and harassment towards persons and groups. It would appear that the policy decisions made by these organisations are consistent with Nigerian laws, notably the Labour Act (2004), the Federal Character Principle, the Public Service Rules (2008), and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended in 2011. No citizen shall be subject to limits, privileges, or advantages which do not apply to other citizens, as stated in Section 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, as amended in 2011. According to subsection 3 of section 14 of the Constitution, "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 a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty." There shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government (1999 Constitution). According to Article 147, subsection 3, the President is responsible for filling the position of Minister of the Federation in line with the provisions of the Constitution. To implement the foregoing provisions, the President shall choose at least one minister from each state who shall be a native of such state. The Federal Character Principles. Section 219 requires an agency to be established to ensure that the composition of the armed forces is in line with the federal character idea, and Section 217 (3) demands that the officer corps and other levels of the armed forces of the Federation reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Using quotas, the Federal Character Principle ensures that persons of all tribes, ethnicity and religion are adequately represented at all levels of government. In line with this idea, it is inappropriate for government agencies to hire disproportionately from just a few states or a small number of ethnic groups. The Federal Character Commission establishes, monitors, and enforces a fair mechanism for

allocating public sector jobs across the country's 36 states by following the Federal Character Principle.

Despite all of these legal provisions, ample perceptions of nepotism and tribalism exist in all sectors of the economy where several cases of ethnoreligious biases are observable. This position is in line with the observations of notable scholars (Jemirade, 2021; Okunmahie, 2022). Managers at companies with very multifarious workforces have the challenge of preventing cultural tensions caused by the company's policies and procedures. The composition of influential groups along tribal, ethnic, regional, and linguistic lines in Nigerian companies has a major ascendancy on staff engagement and retention. In addition to managing the variety of their workforce across geographic areas, firms may have to encapsulate the history and customs that are specific to each country under their corporate umbrella. The managers must understand the social structure of a country to succeed there. Religion, ethnicity, language, gender, age, and socioeconomic class are just a few of the many categories that divide people within a country.

Handling Multifariousity in the workplace means creating an environment where every employee may feel safe and productive. The culture and ideals of an organisation greatly affect the behaviour and outlook of its personnel. If employees' ideas are stifled and they are not given due credit for their creativity, inventiveness, and other exceptional achievements, productivity may suffer. Workplace stress levels grow when there are fewer chances for managers, supervisors, subordinates, and colleagues to engage in friendly conversation with one another. (Nadeem, et al., 2020). Lack of trust amongst coworkers is a major contributor to workplace stress, which in turn reduces productivity. If an employee feels unappreciated, thinks they are being promoted at a slower rate than their peers because of their ethnicity, or has learnt that they cannot progress in their job, their work performance is likely to deteriorate. He or she may decide to leave the firm permanently. Skilled workers often go to work for a competitor after leaving their previous employer. This type of personnel turnover is counterproductive to the company's long-term ability to penetrate new markets, increase sales, and provide exceptional service to current patrons among other success metrics. If a firm does not foster a welcoming environment for all employees, those workers are not likely to perform as effectively, and the company as a whole will suffer. Businesses pay more in absenteeism, employee turnover, and medical costs as a result of stress brought on by working long hours and fierce competition for positions. The costs of stress in the workplace may be measured both monetarily and emotionally. Intergroup conflict is exacerbated by variables such as workforce demographics, stereotypes, cultural differences, and ethnocentrism. Discrimination may take various forms, such as exclusion from or isolation within a system, biased management practices, rules, and procedures, uneven access to information, and fewer employment possibilities.

Ethical viewpoints can be influenced by factors such as religious affiliation, racial background, and gender. Managers in the modern day are tasked with creating an ethically sound workplace for their employees, one in which workers may carry out their duties with the least possible amount of moral ambiguity. Arora (2022) claims that the racial and gender composition of work groups influences both competitive and cooperative behaviour and exemplified the positive outcomes of social cohesion and social comparison, Keeping social differences among groups from causing prejudice, stress, and conflict, and instead developing them into advantageous strengths, is a pressing issue. Employees may be less willing to take chances if they do not feel accepted and encouraged in the workplace. Employees' physical and emotional health, as well as their relationships with coworkers and superiors, can be negatively impacted by workplace aggression and violence. Both employees and managers are concerned with preventing acts of violence and antagonism in the workplace without infringing on anyone's constitutional rights. Management is increasingly responsible for addressing workplace aggression and violence through firms' cultural convergence.

Multifariousity in Firms

Having a workforce that is culturally, ethnically and religiously multifarious is a major challenge among the other numerous challenges that modern organisations face. In Nigeria, a country of over two hundred million people, managers of work organisations have the formidable challenge of managing such multifariousity in the workplace because more than half of the population is of working age ((United Nations, 2023). Managers in a country with diverse multi-sociocultural and multi-ethnoreligious divides should pay close attention to the issues of cultural and religious multifariousity in the workplace. Employees' interactions, both individually and in teams, and the effects on firms' bottom lines could be very intriguing. Managers who are skilled in the understanding of multifariousity can increase productivity by tapping into the similarities and differences among their staff members across

demographics such as age, culture, physical abilities and disabilities, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and gender. Nonetheless, multifariousness issues are commonplace in corporations; as a result, it is crucial to identify and address them with utmost seriousness. Some of the issues briefly discussed include:

Bias and intolerance

The social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) posits that individuals often prioritize their group over others. This makes identities and social categorisations salient in situations where there are various dimensions of Multifariousness. It invariably means that the more perceived bias persons feel, the higher premium they place on a social category. Based on this theorisation, bias and intolerance appear to flourish in contexts with a wide range of demographics. Such acts of bigotry, ethnic and racial chauvinism, prejudice and discrimination seem to feature prominently in workplaces as individuals and groups tend to claim superiority over others. Salter and Migliaccio (2019) have argued that allyship could be an instrument to reduce biases and intolerance to enhance the benefits of multifariousness in firms. Several aspects of organisational processes in terms of human resource management functions are believed to be influenced by a person's ethnicity or religion.

The prevailing social norms will dictate the prevalence level of biases in the workplace. For example, group norms do not only provide a common worldview but also communicate expectations of how one should act to gain the approval of group members and avoid unfavourable criticism. The dynamics of a workgroup influence how people think, feel, and behave. Thus, bias is more likely to occur on the job when coworkers receive cues about appropriate behaviour from their peers who exhibit bias. As most work nowadays is done in teams or groups, social pressure to conform to group norms is a major driver of individual effort. Even in the lack of a formal team structure, a psychological feeling of community and informal social standards sometimes evolves in many settings. This situation illustrates the issue of prejudice towards the outgroup members. Stereotyping gives a biased view of people and creates anticipated behaviour of others instead of learning fresh information about people in the workplace. Overt and subtle stereotyping are both prevalent in workplaces and society (Boulet, et al, 2023). An overt stereotype is a function of a biased person's intentional and purposeful activity, effort and awareness, all of which are in their purview and control. Conversely, subtle stereotypes are displayed without any deliberate action on the part of the person displaying them. The use of subtle stereotypes is a major contributor to modern manifestations of bias.

Covert immodesty

Covert immodesty includes all forms of impolite behaviours that may not be openly displayed but are better understood by the victim to which the behaviour is directed at. Subtle rudeness, disrespect, mistreatment and discourtesy are possible lived experiences of covert immodesty. Nigerian workplaces may have observable pockets of such settings of covert immodesty that employees experience based on their ethnicity, religion or gender. Discourtesy in the workplace is destructive to working relationships and can slow down team efforts and increase turnover intentions (Namin, et al, 2021; Wang & Chen, 2020)

As a means of coping with the increased stress caused by workplace covert immodesty, some employees may turn to substance abuse. If an employee is treated rudely regularly, they may lose trust in their superiors and decide to leave the company. A decrease in job satisfaction and dedication, an increase in feelings of burnout, and a greater likelihood of wanting to quit present employment have all been reported by workers who have witnessed disrespectful behaviour toward coworkers. These observer effects are explained by an increased sensitivity to negative signals as a result of a pessimistic worldview since they remain after controlling for negative affectivity.

People's reactions to limits may be consistent whether or not such boundaries exist. When people believe they have been treated unfairly due to some aspect of their difference, no matter how minor, they often experience feelings of alienation and anger. A disrespected worker is more likely to choose ineffectiveness over making contributions to the firm. The cost of squandered talent and creativity is shared by everybody and as noted by Butt and Yazdani (2021) such workplace immodesty is counterproductive to the organisation.

Cliques and clans formation

It is not uncommon to see persons aligning along certain lines of interpersonal relationships within firms. The persons form close-knit groups of selective membership and in other cases, the groups' membership feels united by kinship or common ethno-religious descent. In a multi-dimensional diverse corporate setting, such formations are more likely to be intensified and pronounced, especially along ethno-religious lines. The saliency of each of the various minute and subtle identities and categorisations becomes prominent. Tensions can emerge when people from different groups engage with one another. Studies indicate that conflicts are common in such situations (David, et al., 2023). The link between multifariousity and aggression as a form of workplace mistreatment has been observed with the dynamics of cliques as a medium of the stoppage or supporting of mistreatment (Hershcovis, et al., 2020). A person's disparities in race, gender, sexual orientation, or age may cause tension on the job. Multifariousity of all kinds, including gender and race, has been demonstrated to make interpersonal interactions more difficult to navigate. Tension and conflict can arise when employees with vastly different personalities and worldviews work together. However, individual differences could find shared characteristics if properly handled. It may be argued that when people spend more time in a group, they become less prone to judge each other by their outward appearance. This lends credence to the theory that familiarity among team members helped reduce the negative impact of multifariousity on cohesiveness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Managing multifariousity entails devising strategies to attract participants from a wide range of demographics. A firm's cultural convergence that values employee input and encourages a feeling of personal accountability appears a vital asset to progressive-minded firms. Multifariousity in firms is a natural phenomenon and cultural convergence is a deliberate organisational environmental creation by management to serve as a habitat to evolve novel behaviours that will be unique to the organisation that will enable the firms to operate more efficiently. This paper suggests that managers avoid creating convergence that results in insensitivity, victimisation, bias, counterproductive behaviours, voluntary turnover and a whole host of other workplace challenges.

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