Influence of Workforce Diversity on Employee Performance In Construction Firms In Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract:

In every organization, employees are regarded as the most valuable assets as their activity is crucial to achieving organizational goals. However, due to the diverse composition of the Nigerian populace, employees come from diverse regions and backgrounds which play a significant role in the way they conduct their lives and behave on the job. Therefore, this study aimed at assessing the influence of workforce diversity on employee performance in construction firms in Abuja. Primary data was obtained through well-structured questionnaire and administered to the employees of Urban Shelter Properties, Abuja. Analysis of the data was carried out with the use of Mean Item Score (MIS). The study revealed that the most influential factors affecting employee performance are commitment, competency, and organizational support with MIS 4.71, 4.69 and 4.47 respectively. While, the most effective strategies for enhancing performance of a diverse workforce are modeling of good behaviour by executive management, training of employees on diversity awareness and sensitivity and reverse mentoring between old and young employees with MIS of 4.27, 4.24, 4.20 respectively. Thus, the study concluded that the workforce diversity has a significant positive effect on employee performance. Based on this finding, the recommended that construction firms should consider increasing the skills, competence and commitment of employee's through adequate training and provides them with necessary support in order to improve their performance. Construction firms should formalize, implement and measure diversity policies that will build an inclusive workplace in order to reap the benefits of diversity.

Keywords: Construction Firms, Workforce Diversity, Employee Performance, Commitment, Training.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry plays a critical role in the socio-economic advancement of various Nations globally (Usman *et al.*, 2014). This industry makes important contribution to the development process in developing countries, engaging a large part of the country's labour force and assisting in the enhancement or acquisition of skills (Bejide and Iyagba, 2015). In Nigeria, the construction industry is a wide range of loosely integrated organizations comprising of different professionals that collectively build, modify and repair series of building and civil engineering projects (Akanni *et al.*, 2015). According to Ukachukwu and Iheriohanma (2013), employees can be seen as a collection of individuals working in an organization to produce value (goods and services) under a contract of employment in return for wages. Employees can make or break the organizations reputation and can adversely affect productivity at such they can be seen as the most valuable assets of every organization (Sendawula *et al.*, 2018). Employee performance is the degree to which an employee executes his or her duties and responsibilities (Shields, 2016). It is seen as how well an employee achieves his or her goals and objectives (Rath and Conchie, 2009). Yusuf *et al.* (2014) regard employee performance as the ability of an employee to meet set objectives within the scope of time and parameters.

According to Akinnusi *et al.* (2017), Nigeria is perhaps the giant of Africa in many respects. It is the most populous country with a projected over 180 million people, with multi-ethnic, multi-

religious and multi-cultural diversities. Thus, employees working for organizations may come from various diverse regions and backgrounds which play a significant role in the way they conduct their lives and behave on the job. Robbins and Judge (2013) refer to diversity as any characteristic that makes people different from one another. It is the differences and similarities amongst employees in terms of gender, age, educational background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other dimensions (Akpakip, 2017). Therefore, workforce diversity refers to organizations that are becoming more heterogeneous with the mix of people in terms of gender, age, race, and education background (Robbins and Judge, 2013). Diversity can affect the workplace in both positive and negative ways. It can lead to new innovations, knowledge sharing, knowledge enhancement and team coherent. While the problems it generates are miscommunication, creation of barriers, dysfunctional adaptation behaviours, discrimination, conflicts, prejudice and bias (Bamgbade *et al.,* 2014). Increasing globalization necessitates more interaction among individuals from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds than ever before. For this reason, diversity has become an essential requirement for organizations to be creative and exposed to change (Mazur, 2010). Organizations such as construction firms can not shy away from engaging diverse workers partly because skill is not evenly distributed between the various diverse tribes, regions and backgrounds, there is shortage of skill, hence the need to get the right person that will be able to carry out the work regardless of the region or tribe the person originates from. Managing these diverse workers is therefore paramount for the growth of the organizations that employed those employees (Loosemore *et al.*, 2012). This necessitates an assessment of the influence of workforce diversity on employee performance in construction firms in Abuja, Nigeria.

CONCEPT OF DIVERSITY

Diversity is an individual phenomenon generated by the members of a team themselves who base on their diverse social characteristics label others as similar or dissimilar. It is the combined, all-inclusive mix of social differences and similarities along any given dimension (Mazur, 2010). The study of Mazur (2010) further revealed that diversity is not only concerned with the effects of the diversity within an organization but also defines the level of honesty to diverse characteristics that exists between members of the organization, work groups, and culture. It does not only look at how individuals identify themselves but also how they categorize others. Diversity means different thing to different people. According to Otike *et al.* (2010), diversity can be defined as a mixture of individuals who bring a variety of backgrounds, perceptions, beliefs, and benefits as resources to the groups and organizations with which they work together. Dessler (2011) defines diversity as the collection of demographic features that describe a company's labour force, mainly in terms of race, sex, culture, national origin, handicap, age, and religion. Jones and George (2011) proclaim that diversity is dissimilarities among individuals in age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic background and capabilities/disabilities. Diversity recognizes differences. On this basis, The Law Society of Scotland (2013) opined that diversity is purely concerned with recognizing that every individual possesses different visible and non-visible characteristics. Akinnusi *et al.* (2017) affirmed that diversity indicates the variety, variegation and collection of features, both observable and undetectable, which constitute a phenomenon in both the living and non-living worlds. Diversity also recognizes similarities. In this vain, The Society for Human Resource Management (2009) defines diversity as the combined mix of differences and similarities that cut across various dimensions such as individual and organizational characteristics, values,

beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences and behaviours. According to Patrick (2010), the subject of diversity is important to every organization and they are predicted to become even more important in the near future due to increasing differences in the population of many countries. Hence, companies, organizations and firms looking to become more productive and competitive must direct their effort on issues of diversity to harness the potential benefit it offers.

DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Research into the concept of diversity has indicated three dimensions of diversity. These include; the primary differences such as age, gender etc., the secondary differences such as educational background, communication style, etc. and tertiary differences such as beliefs and Group Norms (Akpakip, 2017).

Diversity in the context of age is seen as an integral part of various organizations. It is a common occurrence that exists in virtually all groupings, such as organizations, families, work or team groups composed of individuals identified with varying age generations (Kunze *et al.*, 2013). Rowe (2010) postulates that labour force is unique in its generational diversity. Thus each generation have confidence that their strengths are supreme over those of other generations. As a result of this, organizations are faced with emerging challenges when trying to attract, retain, manage and motivate quality employees. According to Rowe (2010), age diversity can benefit both the organization and the employees. He postulates further that work environments characterized with diverse employees of varying ages creates better working relationships and enhances social cohesion for all. Backes-Gellner and Veen (2009) affirmed that productivity and efficiency reduction, clashes and conflicts among employees are for the most times due to the existence of "generation gaps". The study of Zemke *et al.* (2013) refers to generation as a collection of people born and living as the same period, who have common attitudes, tastes, knowledge and experiences that affect their thoughts, values, beliefs and behaviors. Each generation have diverse perceptions and expectations that they bring to the work environment, perceptions of how they are to behave, how they will manage others and expectations of how they will be managed by their employers or managers. According to Powell (2011), gender is the physical interpretation of someone as either a male or female. Gender diversities are noticeable in prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Powell (2011), states that the usual descriptions used for women's absenteeism in senior management roles has been that of the "glass ceiling". Glass ceiling defines specific organizational practices and processes that restrict women from attaining the highest position of their particular field only because they are women. Also, the average female employee working in most organizations does not only receive lower pay but also have an economic status that is lower than that of their male counterparts. This gap can be partly attributed to the lower average wages which workers in female intensive occupations receive. Powell (2011) further added that glass ceiling is not a barrier that is based on women's lack of ability to handle upper level management positions. Instead, the barrier keeps women from climbing up the managerial ladder only because they are women. Removing these barriers remains a major challenge to most organizations worldwide. As a result, effective organizational policies that promote equality in pay and other benefits programs for women are needed in organizations.

According to Akpakip (2017), educational background is related to any type of official training, education or even career that an individual has learnt over time. Thus, educational diversity is defined as the range of individual's social and personal differences, which represent a basic

aspect in any educational setting (Rayner, 2009). The study of Akpakip (2017) revealed that it is common for people to have the opinion that educated employees can accomplish certain tasks easily, effectively and efficiently than those who are not. This simply means that an individual who is knowledgeable can perform better at tasks that require skills and knowledge. Daniel (2009) revealed that mobility rates largely depend on the type and level of education acquired. Based on Daniel findings, educational level plays a major role in determining an employee's performance. Furthermore, Hoff (2014) discovered that organizations found it difficult to employ workers who lack basic training, work experience, or required educational level to perform. This only affirms that education background is critical to employee's employability level. As such, employees cannot find a job and perform well without adequate education background. According to Emiko and Eunmi (2009), employee's productivity depends largely on the level of education they receive. The more education they receive, the more productive they are expected to be.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Workforce diversity is connected to workforce, hence the need to first look at the word workforce. Rao and Bagali (2014) posits that workforce is a combination of male and female employees coming from various backgrounds, older or younger employees, workers who are physically challenged and various other workers who are different from each other.

Digressing from workforce to workforce diversity, Griffin and Moorhead (2014) defined workforce diversity as those major differences and similarities that exist among employees within an organization. Nwinami (2014) sees workforce diversity as that uniqueness which includes; an individual's personality, income, age, marital status, work experience, ethnicity/race, gender, religion and those views which supposes and sustains an organizations core values. It can also be seen as those organizations that are turning out to be more mixed with respect to its workforce composition based on characteristics as age, ethnicity, expertise, etc. (Robbins and Judge, 2013).

FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE

Employees are among an organization's most important resources and therefore seen as their most valuable assets. This is because the nature and quantity of work they execute have a direct impact on the productivity of an organization. The study of Rahman et al. (2011) reports that the performance of an employee can be determined based on the following three factors; work environment, ability and motivation. Thus expressed by the formula; Performance = f (work environment x ability x motivation). In this context, ability refers to physical, emotional and intellectual capability of the employee to carry out his task. Robert et al. (2015) affirm that employee performance is founded on ability and motivation as the basic factors. Thus in their own context, Performance = f (ability x motivation). They further added that the above formula is a means by which human resource management conceptualize the determining factors of employee performance. This means that if employee's motivation or ability is low, the subsequent effect will be that employee's performance will also be low. Robert et al. (2015) explained that Ability means competencies, commitment and self-efficacy (self-efficacy is a motivational factor and it is that believe that an employee has concerning his or her ability to perform the task assigned to him/her) while Motivation has to do with contingencies, goal-task clarity, feedback, system- technology, task interference opportunity and workplace layout. System factors include factors such as poor relationship among employees, lack of adequate training, etc. Motivation looks at the employee's desire and commitment to his job.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research and Data Collection

According to Eric, (2009) research design is the deliberate strategic approach used in conducting a scientific enquiry. This study adopts survey research design method using quantitative research approach. The study adopted primary source for it data collection using a well-structured questionnaire, while descriptive and inferential analysis were used for data presentation. According to Eric (2009), sampling Frame is a list of every member or unit of the population from which the sample will be drawn. The sampling frame for this study consists of Architects, Builders, Quantity Surveyors, Engineers, Project Managers and Administrative Staffs that makes up the entire population. The study adopted the entire population due to its size and as such sampling was not necessary. According to Masuku and Singh (2014), an entire population will have to be sampled in small populations (i.e. less than 100) to achieve a desirable level of precision. A total of 92 employees were adopted. Data analysis involves making sense out of the numerical values obtained through the data collection process (Eric, 2009). This research utilizes both the Descriptive and Inferential method of analysis. Descriptive analysis using Mean Item Score (MIS) was employed to identify and examine factors influencing employee performance in construction firms, and to examine strategies for enhancing the performance of a diverse workforce.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section gives the presentation of results of data collected from the analysis carried out. The data collected from the study were analysed using Mean Item score (MIS), Frequencies and Simple Percentages with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and were presented in Tables.

Table 1: Demographical Information of the Respondents' Survey

		Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Age (years)	18 - 30	22	34.9	34.9	34.9
	31 - 40	16	25.4	25.4	60.3
	41 - 50	17	27.0	27.0	87.3
	51 and Above	8	12.7	12.7	100.0
Gender	Male	42	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Female	21	33.3	33.3	100.0
Profession	Quantity Surveyor	10	15.9	15.9	15.9
	Architect	8	12.7	12.7	28.6
	Builder	7	11.1	11.1	39.7
	Engineer	11	17.5	17.5	57.1
	Project Manager	8	12.7	12.7	69.8
	Admin Staff	19	30.2	30.2	100.0
Academic Qualification	ND/NCE	7	11.1	11.1	11.1
	HND	11	17.5	17.5	28.6
	B. Sc./ B. Tech	28	44.4	44.4	73.0
	M. Sc	16	25.4	25.4	98.4
	PhD	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
Experience	0-5	19	30.2	30.2	30.2
	6-10	22	34.9	34.9	65.1
	11-15	14	22.2	22.2	87.3
	16-20	8	12.7	12.7	100.0

Table 2 revealed ten (10) basic factors influencing employee's performance with mean score ranging between 4.71 and 3.01.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Employee's Performance

S/N	Factors Influencing Employee's Performance	MIS	Rank	Decision
1	Commitment	4.71	1st	Very Influential
2	Competency	4.69	2nd	Very Influential
3	Organizational Support	4.47	3rd	Influential
4	Task Clarity	4.41	4th	Influential
5	Relationship with other employees	3.98	5th	Influential
6	Self Confidence	3.89	6th	Influential
7	Emotional state of mind	3.62	7th	Influential
8	Task Interference Opportunity	3.40	8th	Fairly Influential
9	Workplace Layout	3.21	9th	Fairly Influential
10	Feedback	3.01	10th	Fairly Influential

"Commitment" had a mean score of 4.71 and was ranked first, followed by "Competency" which was ranked second with a mean score of 4.69, "Organizational support" with a mean score of 4.47 was ranked third, "Task clarity" ranked fourth with a mean score of 4.41, "Relationship with other employee's" with a mean score of 3.98 was ranked fifth while "Feedback" was the least on table of ranking with a mean score of 3.54. This finding agreed with research result under taken by Robert *et al.* (2015) who explained that employee performance is founded on his or her competency, commitment and self-efficacy.

Table 3: Relationship between Age Diversity and Employee Performance

S/N	Relationship between Age Diversity and Employee Performance	MIS	Decision
1	We include all members of different ages in decision making and problem solving	3.63	Agreed
2	Older people have more experience and possess better problem solving skills	4.20	Agreed
3	This organization provides all age groups with equal opportunities for training and career development	4.22	Agreed
4	I have no problem working with people of different age groups	3.90	Agreed
5	Age difference in work group might cause conflict	3.38	Neutral

Table 3 presents the relationship between age diversity and employee performance. The respondents agreed with a mean of 3.63 that they include all members of different ages in decision making and problem solving. They also agreed with a mean of 4.20 that older people have more experience and possess better problem solving skills. This finding agrees with the study of Akpakip (2017) who affirmed that older employees contribute a lot to the team due to the knowledge and experience they have accumulated over the years. However, it disagrees with the findings of Robbins and Judge (2013) which postulates that it is a common believe that as people get older, their physical ability, speed and coordination starts to decline and job could become boring and the absence of intellectual motivation all contributes to reduced productivity. Further, the respondents agreed with a mean of 4.22 that the organization provides all age groups with equal opportunities for training and career development.

Table 4: Relationship between Gender Diversity and Employee Performance

S/N	Relationship between Gender Diversity and Employee Performance	MIS	Decision
1	Women are involved in the organization's decision making process as much as men	4.40	Agreed
2	Opportunities for growth and advancement exist for both men and women in our organization	3.94	Agreed
3	Dissimilarity in gender leads to poor employee performance	2.17	Disagree
4	At work, I experience lack of bonding with the opposite gender	1.84	Disagree
5	At work, I find it difficult to take instructions from the opposite gender	2.57	Neutral

Table 4 presents the relationship between gender diversity and employee performance. The respondents agreed with a mean score of 4.40 that women are involved in the organization's decision making process as much as men. They also agreed with a mean score of 3.94 that opportunities for growth and advancement exist for both men and women in their organization. Further, the respondents disagree with a mean of 2.17 that dissimilarity in gender leads to poor employee performance. This finding agreed with the study of Kirton and Greene (2016) which opined that gender diverse groups are most likely to make quality decisions much more than a homogeneous workforce.

Table 5: Relationship between Educational Background Diversity and Employee Performance

S/N	Relationship between Educational Background Diversity and Employee Performance	MIS	Decision
1	The difference in educational background does not encourage conflict	3.05	Neutral
2	Diversity in education brings about creativity and enhance our task delivery	4.43	Agreed
3	My educational level and background affects my ability to perform my core task responsibility	4.40	Agreed
4	The recruitment plan of the organization is based on the education diversity of the employees	4.30	Agreed
5	We include all members at different educational level in decision making and problem solving	4.40	Agreed

Table 5 presents relationship between educational background diversity and employee performance the respondents were neutral on whether difference in educational background does not encourage conflict with a mean of 3.05. The respondents agreed with a mean score of 4.43 that diversity in education brings about creativity and enhance task delivery. Similarly, the respondents agreed with a mean of 4.40 that their educational level and background affects their ability to perform their core task responsibility. In addition, the respondents also agreed with a mean of 4.30 that the recruitment plan of the organization is based on the education diversity of the employees. Further, the respondents also agreed with a mean score of 4.40 that they include all members at different educational level in decision making and problem solving. This finding was in tandem with the report of Akpakip (2017) who revealed that educational background of workers can also have significant positive effect on performance as it allows for collection of different capabilities and talents within a workforce.

Table 6: Employee Performance

S/N	Employee Performance	MIS	Decision
1	I enjoy my tasks and the division's work approach	4.43	Agreed
2	I am committed to the mission and direction of my organization	4.40	Agreed
3	I am motivated to complete the task that is assigned to me	4.30	Agreed
4	Despite all differences, I co-operate well with my colleagues	4.40	Agreed
5	I am given the chance to try my own method of doing the job	3.73	Disagree

Table 6 presents the employee performance. The respondents agreed with a mean of 4.43 that they enjoy their tasks and the division's work approach. The respondents also agreed with a mean of 4.40 that they are committed to the mission and direction of their organization. Further, the respondents agreed with a mean of 4.30 that they are motivated to complete the task that is assigned them. In addition, the respondents agreed with a mean score of 4.40 that they co-operate well with their colleagues despite all differences. Lastly, the respondents agreed with a mean of 3.73 that they are given the chance to try their own method of doing the job. These findings agree with Magoshi and Chang (2009) that workplace diversity influences employee motivation and commitment positively.

Table 7: Strategies for Enhancing Performance of a Diverse Workforce

S/N	Strategies for Enhancing Performance of a Diverse Workforce	MIS	Rank	Decision
1	Executive management should model good behaviour	4.27	1st	Effective
2	Adequate diversity awareness and sensitivity training of all employees	4.24	2nd	Effective
3	Managers should encourage reverse mentoring between old and young employees	4.20	3rd	Effective
4	Measuring and reporting diversity performance through surveys	4.08	4th	Effective
5	Offering flexible employments that enable employees to have a balance between work, family and religion	3.57	5th	Effective
6	Management should create a diversity portfolio such as Chief Diversity Officer to lead diversity initiatives	3.11	6th	Fairly Effective
7	Increasing the representation of women and minorities in the recruitment and selection of staffs	2.97	7th	Fairly Effective
8	Organizing diversity integration opportunities where employees share their cultural and religious beliefs	2.81	8th	Fairly Effective
9	Developing a diversity dictionary to provide insights and quick information about different groups	2.46	9th	Less Effective
10	Incorporating religious and cultural holidays for a day that is of cultural significance to the employees	2.40	10th	Less Effective

Table 7 revealed ten (10) basic strategies for enhancing performance of a diverse workforce with mean score ranging between 4.27 and 2.40. Strategies such as "Executive management should model good behaviour", "Adequate diversity awareness and sensitivity training of all employees" and "Managers should encourage reverse mentoring between old and young employees" were ranked first, second and third with a mean score of 4.27, 4.24 and 4.20 respectively. "Measuring and reporting diversity performance through surveys" ranked fourth with a mean score of 4.08, "Offering flexible employments that enable employees to have a balance between work, family and religion" with a mean score of 3.57 ranked fifth, while the least on the table of ranking was "Incorporating religious and cultural holidays for a day that is of cultural significance to the employees" tenth with a mean score of 2.40. These findings were in tandem with the study of Mor-Barak (2014) who identified employee training, cultural audit and recruitment considerations among the top human resource approaches to managing workforce diversity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analyses carried out in this study revealed the following:

i. The most influential factors affecting employee performance are commitment (MIS=4.71), competency (MIS=4.69) and organizational support (MIS=4.47).

ii. The most effective strategies for enhancing performance of a diverse workforce are modeling of good behaviour by executive management (MIS=4.27), training of employees on diversity awareness and sensitivity (MIS=4.24) and reverse mentoring between old and young employees (MIS=4.20).

CONCLUSION

In every organisation, employees are regarded as the most valuable assets as their activity is crucial to achieving organisational goals. However, due to the diverse composition of the Nigerian populace, employees come from diverse regions and backgrounds which play a significant role in the way they conduct their lives and behave on the job. The study assessed the influence of workforce diversity on employee performance in construction firms with a view of providing strategies for enhancing the performance of a diverse workforce. However, the study has revealed that the most influential factors affecting employee performance are commitment, competency and organizational support. The analysis disclosed that the most effective strategies for enhancing performance of a diverse workforce are modelling of good behaviour by executive management, training of employees on diversity awareness and sensitivity and reverse mentoring between old and young employees. Finally, workforce diversity has a significant positive effect on employee performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study led to the following recommendations:

i. Construction firms should consider increasing the skills, competence and commitment of employee's through adequate training and provides them with necessary support in order to improve their performance. Construction firms should formalize, implement and measure diversity policies that will build an inclusive workplace in order to reap the benefits of diversity.

ii. Construction firms should model good behaviour, train employees on diversity awareness and sensitivity and encourage reverse mentoring between old and young employees in order to enhance the performance of a diverse workforce.

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