

Workplace Diversity, People Management and Performance Extent in Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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Abstract

Any workplace characterised by plurality faces challenges such as those posed by diversity and poor people management. This study explores workplace diversity (WD) and people management (PM) in small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria, with a view to determining the extent to which they obtain in Nigerian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and their impact on performance therein. It is anchored on Trajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, which theoretically affirms the impact of WD and PM on the performance of Nigerian SMEs based on social identity factors. Questionnaire and observation constitute the primary data, while library and internet print materials constitute the secondary data. The mixed method is employed along with content analysis, systematic review, and descriptive, interpretive and statistical tools. The analysis shows that WD and PM impact positively on performance in Nigerian SMEs, as in elsewhere across the globe. Workplace diversity is found to obtain at a very high extent, while people management obtains at a low extent. The study concludes that there is a significant correlation between WD and performance on one hand and PM and performance on the other. It charges SMEs in Nigeria and other parts of the globe to imbibe and sustain positive and problem-solving PM practices and harness WD effectively for maximal performance, productivity, profitability and service delivery.

Keywords: Workplace diversity, People management, Performance, Extent, Enterprises

Introduction

The Nigerian workplace is one that is characterised by diversity and the complexities of managing humans and the attendant issues of diversity. Small and medium scale enterprises are known to be making significant contribution to Nigeria's economic development through wealth and job creation, GDP and innovation (Igwe et al., 2018; Eboreime & Gbandi, 2014). Since these business organisations rely on human and material resources for operations, the need to manage people well along with their diversity cannot be over-emphasised. Managing people allows for employee performance and teamwork regardless of the inherent diversity, which together allow for productivity and goals realisation. There is no doubt that employees are bound to perform

significantly where reward systems, motivation and job satisfaction obtain. For these and others to obtain significantly, people and diversity have to be managed well.

The foregoing points are captured by Ajibola et al. (2019) viz: “Human resource maintenance is essential to any organisation to achieve its set goals” (p. 46). This quote highlights the importance of people management (PM), also known as human resource management (HRM). Obviously, where people (human resources) are well managed, employees act and work well, because they are satisfied with the job characteristics at their workplace. Studies agree that effective people management breeds efficiency, employee commitment and performance, group cohesion, higher employee retention, positive attitude, improved skills, greater productivity, and increased profitability in organisations of all scales (Ita, 2021; Anayo et al., 2016; Etim-Robert, 2016; Razouk, 2011; Messersmith & Guthrie, 2010). In view of the benefits of effective people management, this study seeks to ascertain the extent to which small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria manage their people (employees) and workplace diversity as to harness the their impact on their overall organisational performance.

Lack or ineffective PM or HRM affects organisational performance. Shortage of resources and expertise, organisational structure and culture, stakeholders’ varied interests, and environmental, political, legal and economic factors pose serious challenges to organisations, most especially small and medium scale enterprises (Fajana et al., 2011; Cardon & Stevens, 2004). The effects of these challenges include poor performance, low employee skills, lack of motivation, high turnover, and low productivity (Anayo et al., 2016; Fajana et al., 2011). It is in view of the foregoing that this study seeks to:

- (i) Explore the extent of workplace diversity, people management and performance in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria.
- (ii) Determine the impact of people management on organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs.
- (iii) Establish the impact of workplace diversity on organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs.

Conceptual Approach

Workplace diversity, as Ita (2021) rightly puts it, refers to a situation in which individuals making up the workforce of an organisation work together smoothly or with minor issues regardless of their socio-cultural and geographical differences, as each of them has, and brings to place unique views, perspectives and approaches to work and situations. She emphasises that it is quite interesting that the differentials rather serve as harmonised factors for better, innovative, creative, critical and multifaceted means of solving problems requiring a diverse team (Ita, 2021). Nwode (2022) is of the view that performance is the total outcome of what is realised as one’s achievement or a result for a task, academic or otherwise. Ayat (2019) and Armstrong (2012) share the definition that performance is an individual’s behaviour and results, and their way of getting a work done. For Durga (2017), performance is about executing a task or accomplishing or achieving employee performance in terms of the extent of their efficiency and achieved work results that impact positively on them and their affiliate organisations.

Organisational performance is described as the extent to which the organisations achieve their goals (Osaze & Anao, 2000). This definition does not look at organisational performance beyond the interests of the organisations. It leaves out the interests of the employees and the public without which organisations cannot survive. In addition, Shell (2010) notes that organisational performance is the extent to which organisations fulfil their promises to their employees and shareholders. This definition captures the interests of employees and stakeholders alone, leaving out those of the organisations and their publics or clients. This study adopts the above given definitions of performance by Nwode (2022), Ayat (2019), Durga (2017) and Osaze and Anao (2000), which tally considerably. The present study defines organisational performance as a state or a situation in which organisations deliver services satisfactorily and timely to their clients or publics, meet the welfare of their employees, and maximally achieve profitability and their set-out goals.

The kind of PM or HRM practice adopted by an organisation determines how and the extent to which it manages its people with their diversity. Studies confirm that PM practices, such as reward systems, training, incentives, and performance appraisal, exert significant positive impact on employee performance, organisation productivity, service delivery, increased sales, profitability and goals realisation (Igwe et al., 2018; Anayo et al., 2016; Fajana et al., 2011; Razouk, 2011). Also, staff training and development increase employee retention in organisations, as in those in Nigeria (Anayo et al., 2016; Etim-Robert, 2016). Motivation of employees by employers and/or the management increases performance (Besong, 2018; Etim-Robert, 2016). Motivation is an essential component of PM practices. Motivation is increased by performance appraisal and feedback (Wambe, 2021; Fajana et al., 2011).

Performance appraisal is a process that is carried out to enable both individuals and organisation analyse, examine and evaluate the performance of specified objectives over a period of time, which could be formal or informal (McCourt & Eldridge, 2003). Ajibola et al. (2019) are of the view that “performance appraisal is one of the determinants of employee engagement” (p. 46). They agree that when employees consider performance appraisal as being fair and just, they feel satisfied and remain committed to their work and thereby give out performance and productivity. Performance appraisal is meant for two major purposes: developmental and administrative purposes. Appraisal can be conducted once, twice, or even several times a year, depending on the organisation’s choice, resources, capacity and what is to be evaluated with regard to organisation’s objectives and strategies. The sources of appraisal are managers, supervisors, self-appraisal, subordinate, peer team and customer appraisals (Nassazi, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Trajfel and Turner’s (1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT hereafter). SIT is adopted because it appropriately suits the study. Workplace diversity concerns social identity, just as organisational matters and performance have social bearing. Trajfel and Turner (1979) postulate that social labels or schematic categories, such as age bracket, gender, race, education level, marital status, health status, religion, club, political party and so on, are used by employees to identify themselves with a group, as where they belong to. The theorists are of the view that these groups are the bases of egotism and self-confidence or agony and low self-confidence, and

workers' behaviours are shaped, influenced and/or polluted by the orientations and principles of the group they belong to (Trafjel & Turner, 1979).

The aforementioned factors undoubtedly impact positively or negatively on the performance of employees. The schemas or categories are influenced by attitude or behaviour, perception, context, workplace environment, job characteristics or models, personality attributes, belief, culture, internalised orientation, choice, level of education and experience, among other factors. Trafjel and Turner (1979) also state that high self-confidence is developed by a group through discriminating and pre-judging members of other groups. This is described by Trafjel and Turner (1979) as 'in group and out group classification'. Thus, social identity is made manifest as employees of a given organisation or profession discriminate against or judge those outside their circle. Meanwhile, they collaborate, co-operate, and have mutual interaction and communication with one another distinctly from what they do to non-members of their circle.

Basically, there are variations among individuals and groups on the basis of the above mentioned identity categories. SIT considers these identities and explain how they work and the issues that are associated with them. Thus, SIT aptly suits this study, because it captures the concerns of the study. It explains how workplace diversity, a social identity mechanism, impacts positively on employee performance in as far as it is managed accordingly. It affirms the issues associated with or arising from identities, including cultural diversity, and yet goes on to explain how the issues can be suppressed for the realisation of the prospects of social identity. Trafjel and Turner (1979) fail to explain why members of a social group discriminate against and pre-judge non-members. Also, although these theorists also fail to identify or explain the factors behind the identity categories, which the present study has highlighted above, their postulations about social identity are practicable. The strengths of the theory outweigh the weaknesses, which is why this study adopts it as its theoretical framework.

Related Studies

There is a correlation between performance and workplace diversity, as affirmed by Hussein (2022), Stahl and Maznevski (2021), Fredrick and Awolusi (2020), Jacob et al. (2020), Maathir et al. (2019), Charlesraj and Khan(2018), Ochiel et al. (2016), Akl (2015), Hoogendoorn and van Praag (2015), and Kivrak et al. (2009), among others. Ita (2021) and Etim-Robert (2016) show that although diversity also poses some critical or technical issues to organisations, they can be tackled using critical skills, tactics, and strategic planning, communication and implementation. Ita (2021) emphasises that cultural diversity has both positive and negative effects on organisations, including on their projects, performance and management practices. Of course, the management practices of organisations include people (human resource) management and strategic management of both human and non-human resources. Ita (2021) and Ying et al. (2015) are of the view that the prospects of diversity are ultimately realised in performance.

The need to manage people at the workplace has been echoed by Thomas (2006) thus: "Managing workforce diversity entails dealing simultaneously with both the differences and similarities of the workforce" (p. 5). Thomas (2006) agrees that workplace diversity impacts positively on performance because it paves way for a meaningful integration of different measures, skills, experiences, ideas, orientations, etc. Scott and Sims (2016), like Thomas (2006), confirm that

cultural diversity and project performance correlate significantly. Both Scott and Sims (2016) and Thomas (2006) indicate that diversity is a mechanism for attaining organisational goals. Scott and Sims (2016) emphasise that one good thing about cultural diversity at the workplace is that members of such a diverse group embrace the varied ethnical perceptions among them in finding solutions to problems.

The study carried out by Obamiro et al. (2019) shows that the performance of multinational companies is a product of their cultural diversity. The study lends credence to the position of this present study that workplace diversity impacts positively on the performance of Nigerian SMEs and their employees. This assertion is upheld by Simbarashe et al. (2019) and Gupta (2013), who note that employees having a diverse cultural background do better than those that do not, because the cultural diversity impacts more positively than negatively on workplace performance. Diversity is also proven by Tende and Georgewill (2018) to have positive impact on performance, group cohesiveness, leadership and productivity in the Nigerian Police Force. This implies that workplace diversity does same to SMEs in Nigeria and other nations of the world. Also, the study done by Banwo et al. (2015) discovers that diverse groups characterised by cohesiveness usually perform higher than the otherwise ones. The study also lends credence to the position of this present study.

In the same vein, De-Vann et al. (2015) reveal that workplace groups having high diversity and social cohesiveness are extremely productive, because they give out high results. Ogbo et al. (2014) verified that cultural diversity impacts positively on organisational performance, since it allows for deserving organisational performance, profit maximisation, and the realisation of organisational objectives. For Odhiambo (2014), diversity is a viable mechanism of job retention and a moderator of the adverse effects of ethnic demography. To Homan (2013), cultural diversity offers better problem-solving alternatives, innovation and creativity among members of an organisation. Some other studies also confirm that diversity and performance correlate and impact positively on each other (Fredrick and Awolusi, 2020; Ching et al., 2014; Armstrong, 2012; O'Flynn et al., 2001).

Methodology

The multistage method is employed. This involves combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. The descriptive aspect of the study informed the use of qualitative method, while statistical aspect of the research prompted the use of quantitative method. Following the qualitative method, the survey design is employed. The primary data are sourced from four each of small enterprises and medium enterprises respectively. That is, eight firms, involved in the pilot study, were selected randomly from among SMEs in Benin and Sapele in Edo and Delta States of South-South, Nigeria.

That is, two each of small enterprises and medium enterprises in Benin and Sapele respectively were selected randomly. Since some of the enterprises pleaded anonymity, the researcher decided to omit the names as well as profile details of all the organisations from the research work. That is to maintain research ethics. Out of the 280 questionnaires administered, 237 were duly filled and returned. Thus, 237 make up the overall total used for the analysis of data. The analysis involves tables, figures, words, symbols and percentage (%).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Here, only the thematic data are presented. Following the ethics consent of the participants and confidentiality agreement reached with them by the researcher, the demographic data of the questionnaire respondents are not used here. The questionnaire thematic questions analysed here reflect the study problem, objectives, research questions and hypotheses.

Table 1: To what extent are people managed in Nigerian SMEs?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Very High Extent	-	-	1
High Extent	27	11.3	1
Very Low Extent	-	-	1
Low Extent	210	88.7	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

As shown above, 210 of 88.7% respondents indicated the extent to which people are managed in SMEs in Nigeria as being low, not very low. 27 of 11.3% respondents held otherwise, but their claim is statistically inconsequential. The implication of the above is that PM or HRM does not obtain at an appreciable rate in SMEs in Nigeria. The above result answers the research question 1 and thereby meets the research objective 1.

Table 2: People management impacts on performance

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Strongly Agreed	177	74.6	1
Agreed	43	18.2	1
Strongly Disagreed	-	-	1
Disagreed	17	7.2	1
Total	237	100	1

From the above table, it is proven that people management impacts on performance. The proof is given by 177 of 74.6% respondents, who strongly agreed (SA) that PM impacts positively on performance. They are supported by 43 (18.2%) respondents, who agreed (A), but not strongly to the assertion made in the question. On the contrary, 17 (7.2%) respondents claimed otherwise by disagreeing to the assertion. No single response was obtained for the Strongly Disagreed (SD) option. Thus, it is evidential that HRM (or PM) significantly impacts positively on performance.

Upon causing deserving performance, efficiency, productivity, goals realisation, profitability and increased sales are attained. Job satisfaction among employees rouses employee commitment that grounds performance and productivity. It should be noted that the above finding answers the research 2and thereby meets the objective 2.

Table 3: PM has significant impact on performance in SMEs

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Strongly Agreed	218	91.9	1
Agreed	19	8.1	1
Strongly Disagreed	-	-	1
Disagreed	-	-	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

In testing one of the research hypotheses, it is established that PM has significant impact on performance in Nigerian SMEs. 218 of 91.9% respondents strongly agreed, while 19 (8.1%) other respondents agreed, but not strongly. Thus, it is obvious that all the respondents agreed that the hypothetical proposition is factual. The responses validate the hypothesis that gave rise to the above table.

Table 4: PM has no impact on performance in SMEs.

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Strongly Agreed	-	-	1
Agreed	-	-	1
Strongly Disagreed	218	91.9	1
Disagreed	19	8.1	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

The data in the above table reveal that PM has significant impact on (employee) performance in SMEs, as the negative hypothesis is disproven by 218 (91.9%), who strongly disagreed, and 19 (8.1%), who disagreed but not strongly. It follows that the alternate hypothesis is validated by the data in the above table.

Table 5: Training, performance-based compensation, and career development are PM practices that guarantee employee commitment, job satisfaction, efficiency, productivity and employee retention SMEs. Do you dis/agree?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
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Strongly Agreed	60	25.4	1
Agreed	177	74.6	1
Strongly Disagreed	-	-	1
Disagreed	-	-	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

Data presented in the above table prove that performance-based compensation, employee development, and training are job characteristics that guarantee employee commitment, job satisfaction, efficiency, productivity, and employee retention in SMEs. Two sets of respondents gave the proof. These are 60 of 25.4%, who 'agreed strongly', and 177 of 74.6%, who just 'agreed'. The foregoing results highlight the impact PM exert on performance and the resultant effects of performance.

Table 6: Do the following four major dimensions of performance management system: organisational objective, individual objective, performance development and employee satisfaction obtain in SMEs?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Yes	237	100	1
No	-	-	1
I can't tell	-	-	1
Decline	-	-	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

The above reveals that the stated four major dimensions of performance management system: organisational objective, individual objective, performance development and employee satisfaction obtain in SMEs in Nigeria. All the 237 respondents agreed to the query about whether these dimensions obtain or not. It should be noted that the unanimous acceptance to the above does not imply that they obtain therein as supposed. For example, if the dimensions had been split, most of the respondents would have likely said 'No' to the 'employee satisfaction' dimension. That would of course mean that this particular dimension does not really or fully obtain in Nigerian SMEs.

Table 7: To what extent do PM or HRM practices obtain in SMEs?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Very High Extent	-	-	1
High Extent	27	11.3	1

Very Low Extent	-	-	1
Low Extent	210	88.7	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2023

Questioning the extent to which PM or HRM practices obtain in SMEs, data gathered and presented above reveal that the extent to which PM practices obtain in Nigerian SMEs. The extent is low, but not very low. Only 27 of 11.3% claimed otherwise that PM practices obtain at a high extent in SMEs.

Table 8: Do procurement, recruitment and selection, training, development, compensation, rewards, integration (diversity), maintenance and separation (core human resources management practices) obtain in SMEs?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Yes	209	88.2	1
No	-	-	1
I can’t tell	28	11.8	1
Decline	-	-	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2023

As evident in the table above, procurement, recruitment and selection, training, development, compensation, rewards, integration (diversity), maintenance and separation (core human resources management practices) obtain in SMEs. This is proven by 209 (88.2%) respondents, who ticked ‘Yes’. Only an inconsequential 28 of 11.8% otherwise responses were got for the option ‘I can’t tell’. As such, it is established that the aforementioned obtains in SMEs.

Table 9: What kind of impact does workplace diversity exert on performance?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Positive	210	88.7	1
Negative	27	11.3	1
Intermediate	-	-	1
Indifferent			1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2023

The data in the above table show that the kind of impact workplace diversity has on performance is a positive one. While 210 of 88.7% indicated so, only an insignificant number of 27 of 11.3% claimed otherwise that workplace diversity exert negative impact on performance.

Table 10: To what extent does workplace diversity impact on organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs?

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	XSD
Very High Extent	210	88.7	1
High Extent	-	-	1
Very Low Extent	-	-	1
Low Extent	27	11.3	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

The extent to which workplace diversity obtains and impacts on organisational performance in Nigerian SMEs is affirmed to be at a very high extent. It is not high, very low or low. The affirmation is given to by 210 of 88.7%. Only 27 of 11.3% respondents held otherwise, but their responses are of no statistical value compared to those of the other 210 respondents.

Table 11: Which factors commonly militate against performance in Nigerian SMEs?

Options	Freq.	Percentage (%)	XSD
The absence of core human resources management practices and major dimensions of performance management system or poor PM practices and performance management systems			1
The kind of human resources management and employee in the public sector; unfavourable job models; and lack of teamwork, diversity, employee training, work re/design and job satisfaction			1
All of the above	237	100	1
None of the above	-	-	1
Total	237	100	1

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2023

It is quite clear that all the respondents agreed that the above mentioned factors are commonly responsible for employee underperformance in Nigerian public sector. No single figure was got

for other options but for ‘All of the above’ alone. That is, 237 of 100% responses were got for ‘All of the above’.

Discussion of Findings

The findings made above have been given credence by extant studies. Some of them are the studies used for the literature under ‘related studies’ above. A few others are presented hereafter. Accordingly, Ajibola et al. (2019) establish a positive significant relationship between performance appraisal and employee engagement. Daniel (2018) shows that employee performance system is meant to improve on efficiency or bring it to place and for individuals to develop their potentials. Appraising employees’ performance determines how and the extent to which employees should be rewarded, paid salary and promoted. It exposes the weaknesses and strengths of employees, and determines the training, education and development needs of the employees (Daniel, 2018; Etim-Robert, 2016).

Saddam (2017) proves that strategic HRM practices, such as recruitment and selection, training and development, and compensation and rewards, allow for maximal performance and organisational success. Nwachukwu (2016) establishes a link between strategic HRM, HRM practices and competitive strategy (CS) in Nigerian medium-sized enterprises (NMSEs). Nwachukwu’s (2016) study discovers that three levels of linkage in NMSEs, which are administrative, one-way and two-way linkages; and both positive and negative outcomes in NMSEs. Some other studies have proven that the synthesis of individual performance of members and leadership of groups determines the scenery of cohesiveness and propels job retention (Banwo et al., 2015; Forsyth, 2009). Boadu et al. (2014) reveal a direct significant relationship between training and development, and employee performance, and between training and development, and job satisfaction.

Nura (2014) reveal that there is a close relationship between the six human resource management practices (procurement, development, compensation, integration, maintenance and separation) and all the four dimensions of performance management system (organisational objective, individual objective, performance development, and employee satisfaction) among academics in Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Anyadike (2013) confirms that HRM impacts positively on performance and productivity in the Nigeria public organisations. She argues that HR planning is the panacea for employee underperformance in Nigerian public organisations (Anyadike, 2013).

Ude and Coker (2012) show that duly compensated employees are committed, productive and result-driven. Training of staff impacts positively on employees’ performance and organisational manpower productivity. It also impacts positively on service delivery, proffers development potentials, opportunities, efficiency, job enrichment, satisfaction and commitment, and propels innovation, employee performance and organisational productivity (Saleem et al., 2012; Lunenburg, 2010). Guchait and Cho (2010) demonstrate that job satisfaction and retention are attained with the application of efficient management practices, such as staffing, training, appraisal, compensation or reward system, inclusiveness and diversity policies, and favourable working conditions.

Conclusion

This study has explored people management (PM), also known as human resource management (HRM), and performance in Nigerian SMEs. The study also shows that workplace diversity impacts positively on performance and productivity in Nigerian SMEs. It is only when it is not well managed accordingly that workplace diversity rather poses challenges to organisations and even individuals. The extent to which workplace diversity obtains in Nigerian SMEs has been proven to be very high rather than high, very low or low.

The extent to which PM obtains in Nigerian SMEs is proven to be low rather than very low, very high or high. Therefore, there is a significant positive correlation between PM and performance, and workplace diversity and performance, which engender result in productivity, increased profitability and the realisation of organisational objectives. SMEs in Nigeria are charged to key into significant practice of PM or HRM and workplace diversity management so as to attain deserving performance, productivity, profitability and organisational image or reputation.

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