A Research Proposal on Diversity and Inclusion and its Impact on Group Behavior

Teams and Teamwork: Impact of Diversity and Inclusion on Group Behavior

In recent years, calls for diversity and inclusion in organizations have continued to rise due to their known benefits within different organizations. However, while the focus has always been on the benefits of diversity, researchers have also noted that there are some emerging challenges, such as difficulties in ensuring cohesion and unity within groups formed in organizations. According to Witte and Davis (2011), a group is several people in organizations, associations, and institutions who come together and are united by a shared vision. This can either be formal (formed by an organization to meet an objective) or informal (created by different individuals to fulfill personal goals). Shore et al. (2011) note that the roles of groups in organizations have shifted from merely short-term projects to critical product development departments and service delivery teams that allow institutions to meet their objectives in the long-term.

However, the success of any group, whether formed formally or informally within an organization, depends on the ability of their leaders to unite them and enhance their skills to perform. This, in itself, can be challenging in modern workplaces due to the increasingly diverse nature of the groups. Barak (2008) asserts that workplaces are increasingly becoming diverse, and group members have to co-exist despite their different personalities, different intellectual and physical abilities, different values, and even differing attitudes. All these differences are in some cases as a result of the differences in backgrounds, life, and professional experiences or even social stratifications that define the modern forms of diversities in societies (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2015). Group behavior is, therefore, the thoughts of people, their feelings and attitudes, which can be observed while working in a group. For the group members to work cohesively towards any goal, their leaders have to develop policies or structures that would enhance unity amidst these differences. This research will seek to reveal how group behaviors are impacted by diversity and inclusion along with the best approaches to ensure synergy in groups within organizations.

**Problem Identification**

Leaders in organizations across the world have continued to form groups for various purposes within organizations. Even as calls for diversity guide their inclusion processes, most leaders have continued to struggle in their quest to maximize their teams. For one organization, having people from different races, gender, and even ethnicity can be easy due to the existence of an inclusion formula. For another organization, it may lack an inclusion formula, but use policies and merits to ensure groups are adequately diverse. Regardless of the approach, ensuring group success or maximization of skills through unity is the main challenge in many institutions. Shore et al. (2011) acknowledge that while there exists numerous empirical evidence on the benefits of diversities in groups, it is also clear that researchers fail to recognize the struggles of institutions in ensuring the diverse groups work cohesively. The general assumption is always that any good leader can steer their teams towards the desired success. However, there are numerous additional factors about groups, including individual thoughts, feelings, and attitudes (group behaviors) that will always affect their unity. Such factors have to be considered when seeking to ensure the group meets its objectives in the environment.

**Research Questions**

The research will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How does diversity in groups affect group behaviors in organizations?
2. What is the role of inclusion in defining group behaviors in teams?
3. What leadership styles or approaches are critical to ensuring unity in diverse groups amidst the group behaviors?
4. What can organizations do to ensure positive group behaviors for the success of the groups and organizations in general?

**Theoretical Base**

The emergence of diverse groups in organizations can not only be attributed to the rise in globalization and inclusion laws such as affirmative action. According to Shore et al. (2011), additional factors such as the need for belongingness have influenced the type and nature of groups people associate within organizations leading to the diversification of these groups. Nonetheless, within these groups, people will always feel the need to be identified beyond the group as performers. Consequently, this has still affected the relationships and behaviors of the individuals and groups, respectively. These different group dynamics can best be understood through the optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT). This theory was developed by Brewer, who noted that human beings would often form or join groups in the quest to seek validation (or similarity to others) or to be identified as unique based on their individual traits (Shore et al., 2011). When seeking validation, one will tend to join a group characterized by specific characteristics, and while seeking individualization, they are likely to leave a group or association with one which is outside the known groups. These groups that exist outside the identified groups are sometimes referred to as “out-groups.” Regardless of the characteristics, the need to be part of a group is always part of a human desire to balance between their need for validation and individualization.

Groups exhibit different characteristics that always tend to favor their members. Favoritism, cooperation, and loyalty are among the leading features of members in groups as they also guarantee their security within the groups (Shore et al., 2011). Based on the ODT, in the case where an individual feels that they want to be unique, they will begin to identify their group as unique compared to those outside the group. This implies that they will not want to sacrifice the security of being a part of the group. However, when an individual is unable to find satisfaction in the group, they tend to find a balance by stereotyping themselves or others (Barak, 2008). Stereotyping is the creation of a negative perception of self or others based on their characteristics or behaviors (Casad & Bryant, 2016). This has often led to the decline in inclusion opportunities for different people, such as women in high organizational positions, because the groups in these more senior positions (mostly consisting of men) have always perceived those outside their groups as less qualified. These negative perceptions have also always made those with unique characteristics to feel inadequate for joining the groups. The quest to ensure a balance within groups has sometimes led the despised groups to remain in the “out-groups.”

The primary outcomes of stereotyping and prejudices have always been discrimination. In the past, these characteristics were limited to gender and race. In contemporary business environments, additional attributes such as age and social status are emerging as critical factors in the inclusion process (Brown & Juvonen, 2018). Just as explained in the ODT, additional theories such as the realistic conflict theory (RCT) argue that people will, in some cases, act in a manner that seeks to protect the group’s interest (Barak, 2008). Consequently, this will lead to intergroup conflicts.

On the other hand, the equity theory notes that people will tend to focus on the actions of others and try to understand whether they were just or unjust (Barak, 2008). Any incident of injustice will be perceived as the cause of distress, leading to conflict between different groups. However, despite all these arguments, the social identity theory seems to offer the primary explanation for the group behaviors and inclusion approaches in organizations. The “theory postulates that people tend to classify themselves into social categories that have meaning for them, and this shapes the way individuals interact with others from their identity group” (Barak, 2008, p. 245). Based on one’s interpretation of their identity, they will either seek to associate or disassociate with others, affecting their performance within a group or outside the group. Overall, group behaviors will vary depending on the underlying perceptions and attitudes of group members towards themselves, others within the groups, and towards those outside the group.

**Literature Support**

*Diversity and Inclusion*

According to Johnson et al. (2019), one objective of many executives in the business world is to create an environment where diversity and inclusion are present. Sometimes leaders fail to note that the aspect of diversity and inclusion should not only be within the organization but must go beyond it, for it creates a healthy society bond (Huffington Post, 2018). Witte and Davis (2011), notes that it is impossible for an organization to develop various products or solutions toward a given phenomenon when they fail to have a diverse team and leadership. One question that organizational leaders tend to ask is how an organization can be termed to be inclusive and diverse in nature. According to Barker (2015), diversity and inclusion are defined as the mission of an organization to support and enhance a workplace that is diverse and which uses the effects of diversity to achieve a competitive business advantage. The world is unique, and several people have different talents, and this is what diversity encompasses concerning organizations.

*Different Perspectives*

One of the reasons why organizations encourage diversity and inclusion at the workplace is because it offers an opportunity to enhance a variety of different perspectives, which many times leads to an increase in innovation, creativity, and productivity (Harris, 2019). In organizations, most human resource departments are motivated to look at what the employee brings to the organization (Louissant, 2018). For the human resource department, this would mean that they look for employees who have different backgrounds and can contribute invaluable experiences and skills to the company. An organization that has a higher workplace diversity status has the upper hand as compared to those who are limited in diversity (Yampolsky et al., 2013). As a result, they are likely to profit from planning and the execution of business strategies.

There are blind spots that an organization is able to eliminate by ensuring that they have different people onboard. If organizations took the time to employ individuals that vary in backgrounds, culture, and personalities, the probability of enhancing an understanding of how the message, services, or products will be received by consumers would increase (Louissant, 2018). This is, therefore, an effective way through which companies are able to build and strengthen the business by embracing the different perspectives that exist in the organization (Yampolsky et al., 2013). The lack of diversity in an organization is what leads to numerous blind spots where the outside perspective is not considered. This may, in turn, land the organization in trouble since they are not able to embrace the differences that exist in their marketing plan.

*Key to Creativity and Innovation*

The second aspect of diversity and inclusion in any organization is that it is the key to creativity (Li et al., 2017). Those who have a different background at the workplace tend to be way ahead in terms of their experience and exposure, and as a result, can assist the organization to increase its level of creativity and innovation (Luu, 2019). There are many organizations that find themselves in various challenges because they lack the critical ingredient, which is creativity. The presence of a diverse team in an organization is an element that will be effective in the production of creative results as compared to groups that all of their members have the same experience or are from the same culture. Statistics indicate that those who have moved from their birth country to other parts of the world significantly increased the productivity of organizations (Peri, 2016). This is because such people in an organization are able to learn new ways of doing things as compared to their own cultural orientation. A person who is able to diversify his or her own life are generally creative, and organizations will likely look upon such people when they want further insight with regards to creativity.

It is necessary to understand and define creativity in terms of organizational behavior. From Parjanen’s (2012) perspective, creativity is a mental process in which bits of information are organized together in mind to create insightful and useful ideas. Diversity in an organization can be the genesis of how they are able to arrange data in an organized manner as they strive to achieve profitability. Some organizations, such as those in the healthcare industry, continue to struggle as they look for ways through which they can respond to operational challenges (Bullen, 2013). According to Parjanen (2012), one of the means through which problems can be limited is to enhance a culture of diversity and inclusion where employers are able to point at people who can turn the situation around. This is through their creative approach to challenges in the organization. Studies have shown that many employees feel more comfortable working in a diverse setting, for they think all perspectives are valued, which in turn produces resolutions at a faster pace compared to organizations that are not diverse (Magras, 2018).

Similarly, there is a high level of innovation rate that is prompted by organizations that value diversity. There are companies such as Google, Apple, and Microsoft, which remain highly innovative. The secret of their success has been a result of an inclusive and diverse workforce environment that encourages innovation. There are employees within an organization who are exposed to multiple perspectives and as a result, come together with innovative insights. It is worth noting that diversity and innovation can link in various aspects. Top management will always praise employees who can arrive at decisions within a very short time (Meyer and Xin, 2018). An organization that has like-minded thinkers who are able to act fast on an issue but lack diversity may not be poised to achieve better results. Several organizations have missed out on creative ideas, profitability, and innovation simply because they were unable to incorporate people who have a diverse way of thinking. It is a dangerous precedent set when an organization is always thinking in the same line without contrary opinion.

*Higher employee engagement*

In a typical work environment, some managers complain that they are not able to meet the required objectives because members are not actively engaged. However, they fail to realize that when members are of the same cluster, people who enjoy the same relation or tribe, the level of productivity may be low. In most cases, there is no employee engagement because they believe in the status quo. This type of behavior can be costly to the organization, considering that the level of productivity is not to the expected standards. According to Conway et al. (2016), diversity and inclusion have been noted to lead to employee engagement in the workplace.

On the other hand, employees who are considered to be the minority may not feel included and engaged when there is no equal representation of genders (Rubin et al., 2019). In cases where the male population outweighs the female population in an organization, the females may become intimidated due to the apparent domination of the male presence While the female employee may wish to participate actively in the activities of the organization, they always feel that they are underrepresented; hence, their opinion may not matter. While on the other hand, when employees feel that the management is being diverse and inclusive through equal employment opportunities for its employees, they feel sufficiently represented. Managers can, at times, consider a part of the picture in an organization by only reflecting on employee engagement without covering workplace diversity and inclusion. The two, namely diversity and commitment, are a powerful combination that goes together.

*Low level of employee turnover*

The other form of behavior generated by diversity in the workplace is that managers get to benefit from low levels of employee turnover. Many employers feel that an organization that offers equal opportunity for all people is beneficial for employee retention. According to Poo et al. (2012), an environment where there is a diverse workforce is always considered to be more inclusive as compared to those who do not nurture this policy. The concept embraced by diversity is that all employees will feel valued and accepted in the company. They desire to continue supporting the objectives of the organization, for they are happy and content with their quality of life with the company. There is a sense of belonging that is created in a diverse environment as compared to those that are not diverse (Poo et al., 2012). Employees also tend to stay longer at organizations when they feel included and are happy with the policies and objectives of their employer. It is, therefore, true that there is a lower turnover in organizations with a high level of diversity.

*Company reputation*

An organization that creates a behavior of workplace diversity and inclusion is able to boost the reputation and brand of the organization. Indeed, organizations that continue to embrace and promote diversity at the workplace are viewed as exceptional organizations that are socially responsible and conscious. Communities tend to support organizations that encourage and embrace diversity and inclusion, which in turn increases the likelihood of success for the company. The culture and environment that is created by a diverse organization is one that appeals not only to potential employees but to investors as well.

**Proposed Method**

The research will utilize the qualitative research method. In a qualitative study, Silverman (2016) asserts that the researcher seeks to understand the phenomena by evaluating the underlying meanings in the data collected. The approach is non-numerical and, therefore, aims to use symbols and themes within the data to explain human behaviors and interactions. The qualitative approach is founded on the positivist paradigm, which acknowledges that reality can be observed and explained without interfering with the research’s objectivity (Ormston et al., 2014). The target population for the study will be focused on groups within various departments of an organization. Specifically, focused groups will be considered and selected through convenience sampling. In this sampling technique, the researcher selects the participants that are closest to them as this saves time and resources, especially when dealing with larger populations (Emerson, 2015). The focused groups will then be interviewed using questionnaires consisting of both structured and unstructured questions. The intention at this level will be to gain adequate data about the participants while remaining objective. The group leaders will also be engaged separately through individual interviews to gain their insights about group behaviors, as noted through their leadership position. This will also be critical towards noting how the leaders’ decisions and actions are influenced during the inclusion and diversification processes of the groups within their teams.

**Analysis**

There are numerous methods for analyzing qualitative data. In this case, the thematic analysis will be utilized. Braun et al. (2019) define thematic analysis as the use of patterns or themes emerging from the data to explain the phenomenon. In this study, patterns such as “favoritism and trust” can be used to describe loyalty within in-groups, while “group attitudes” can be used to explain engagement levels within the organization.

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