

The Development of Positive Inter-Group Attitudinal Disposition for Workplace Connectedness

Kuroakegha Bio Basuo

Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, P.M.B. 071, Amassoma. Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

*E-mail :kuroakeghabasuo@yahoo.com

Abstract: In this paper, the role of the development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition in advancing workplace connectedness is discussed. The development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition is identified as crucial in addressing workplace differences and conflicting culture, resulting from increased workplace diversity. Literature review offered a conceptualization of the variables, identifying three organizational based actions as necessary in the development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition – namely, team development, workplace acculturation and leadership cultural intelligence. The social identity theory was also adopted as the underpinning theory in the paper, especially since it offers insight on social behaviour as an outcome of the individual’s self-categorization, self-perception and disposition toward significant others occupying or sharing one’s social context based on their identification with particular groups. It was concluded that the development of positive inter-group attitudinal aligns values and facilitates outcomes of collaboration and integration which are necessary for workplace connectedness. To this end it was recommended that organizations focus on advancing exemplary leadership behaviour, be inclusive and focus on diversity in their team development initiatives and actions.

Keywords: *positive inter-group attitudinal disposition, social identity, acculturation, team development, workplace connectedness, leader cultural intelligence*

INTRODUCTION

Connectedness is critical to collaboration in the organization (Fapohunda, 2013). Connectedness in this study goes beyond team work or shared responsibilities, drawing from the conceptualization offered by Fapohunda (2013) who described it as a much deeper feeling of membership and acceptance of others, often premised on shared ideas, beliefs, and also values. Pahuja, Chowdary and Mittal (2021) identified particular challenges associated with the lack of trust, poor understanding and the unwillingness to share information in the organization as linked to workplace differences. This follows the observation of scholars (Kella, 2005; Cho & Morbarak, 2008; Tewari & Kumar, 2019) who share in the perception of leadership, particular such in

Africa, as lacking in inclusivity, overly bias and tribalistic.

Research (Williams, 2010; Ehimare & Ogaga-Oghene, 2011; Kunze, Boehm & Bruch, 2009) bordering on workplace diversity has over the years demonstrated its prevalence in the 21st century, as well as its link to increased innovation, productivity and change readiness – indicating positive outcomes at the organizational level. At the individual level, diversity is noted as enriching the employee’s workplace experience (Macleod, 2013). However, concerns continue to trail the ineffectiveness of existing organizational frameworks and actions in line with bridging group differences and creating stable and harmonic workplaces, especially given the increasing and

undaunted engagement of workers and organizational leaders in tribalistic actions or behaviour, aimed at primarily promoting their groups interest, often times at the detriment of other groups and the organization as well (Macleod, 2013).

He and Brown (2013) pointed out that the development of a positive inter-group disposition or attitude among the organizations workforce depends on a variety of factors. This is because, apart from the individuals background, their interpretations or perceptions of outer-groups, build on a repertoire of reasons and justifications that also stem from the beliefs, opinions and interpretations of in-group members (Williams, 2010). This is as a result of the social constructionism of "significant others" facilitated through one's membership, identification with and shared reality of particular groups, and the adoption of ideologies and beliefs that define and shape the values and disposition of the members of such groups. According to He and Brown (2013), group identification is reinforced through the buy-in and adoption of group

ideas, often leading to the acceptance of group labels, categorization and the defence of their actions or behaviour.

In this vein, one may argue that the organization's approach toward developing and enhancing positive inter-group disposition, fundamentally conditions outcomes of trust, communication, collaboration and as such workplace connectedness. However, while extant literature offers a focus on the imperatives of workforce diversity, and its management through the enactment of functional frameworks, research on the ways and strategies of channelling and modifying existing social bias, especially such as manifested in inter-group attitudinal dispositions, toward improved outcomes of connectedness appears to be scant. This paper thus contributes through its review of literature and theories of viable options and strategies which could be considered useful in addressing poor inter-group relations and dispositions – focusing on a deeper level of inter-group appreciation, acceptance and connectedness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory describes the individual's perception of self and others, drawing from their membership of particular groups (Turner & Reynolds, 2012). The social identity theory is important in understanding the workers capacity for relating with others, and how they perceive such relationships. Tajfel and Turner in 1986 (cited in Turner & Reynolds, 2012) advanced the theory in view of understanding the underpinning influence of group membership on the behaviour and attitudes of individuals within social contexts. As a social psychological concept, the social identity theory is fundamental in predicting workers level of collaboration and support for co-workers, or even the management, considered as belonging to an outer group (Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Eminent ideas linked to the social identity theory are such that present the individual's behaviour as being constantly shaped by the underpinning values and pervading ideologies basis for positive inter-group attitudinal disposition and its implications for workplace

of the group (Mor Barak et al, 2001). Thus group alignment is often emotional – leading to a defensive attitude for group actions and contempt for groups that appear to compete with one's own group. The theory in this way, suggests that individuals share in the realities of their groups and often perceive themselves on the basis of group identification (Mor Barak et al, 2001; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). He and Brown (2013) stated that in conditions of overlaps or cross-categorizations, individuals tend to favour related groups with the most evident or tangible characteristics such as in the case of gender, age or ethnicity – suggesting that attachments to various groups are often expressed based on the substantiality or evidence of related categories rather than abstracts such as political ideologies.

The social identity theory in this paper is applied as a framework for understanding the underlying

connectedness. The theory provides the justifications for behaviour based on evident links to particular groups and the overarching values, beliefs and views of such groups of other groups. He and Brown (2013) argued that individuals tend to have or express stronger levels of identification with categories that are biological and more

physical, especially since these factors are more recognizable and also adopted by outergroups as a basis engaging or relating with workers. The social identity theory thus demonstrates the significance of groups to the individual's social development, and even their choices within and outside the context of the organization.

Inter-group Attitudinal Disposition

Workplace features are increasingly changing (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Kelvin (2012) stated that the 21st century is marked by an explosion in global migration, and a growing mix of groups, diverse on several levels within the workplace. These emerging features have in so many ways redefined the nature of work and workplace relationships with organizations constantly enacting frameworks and policies designed to address evident disparities and conflicting ideas and views in the organization. Kelvin (2012) observed that workplaces that are highly diverse, offers availing affiliations and groupings through which workers often

categorize themselves, identifying with qualities and characteristics that are presumably shared, adopted and expressed by some in the organization. Thus, workplace behaviour and attitudinal dispositions, toward self and significant others, are defined based on self-categorizations and group identification within the organization. According to the Alliant International University (2022) there are four ways in which diversity manifests itself – (a) internal diversity (b) external diversity (c) organizational diversity, and (c) worldview diversity. The related characteristics for each are illustrated using the table 1 below.

Table 1: Types of Diversity

TYPES OF DIVERSITY	CHARACTERISTICS
Internal Diversity	Gender Ethnicity Cultural Identity Age Nationality Sexual Orientation Relationship Status Physical Ability Mental Ability Height
External Diversity	Religion Education Qualification Economic Status Family Status Personal Interests
Organizational Diversity	Place of Work Job Function Management Status Employment Status Income Tenure with Organization Union Affiliation Pay Grade Level
World View Diversity	Political Beliefs Economic Ideologies Epistemological Beliefs Moral Compass

Source: Alliant International University, 2022

Inter-group attitudinal disposition encapsulates the workers frame of mind and behaviour toward others considered as external to one's group. Disposition is shaped by the workers beliefs, experiences and interpretation of the characteristics and features of other group members (Ehimare & Ogaga-Oghene, 2011). According to He and Brown (2013), beliefs or assumptions about others can be borrowed, based on one's membership of a group and the shared realities or assumptions of the group, or they could also be anchored on the workers own direct experience with members of outer-groups. Timmerman et al (2011) stated that the manifestations of inter-group attitudinal disposition are such hold significant implications for the wellbeing of the organization. He and Brown (2013) () noted that attitudes such as group bias, tribalism, and segregation, impact on the level of collaboration and integration in the organization. In the same vein, Timmerman et al (2011) affirmed that the development of positive inter-group is paramount in addressing the organizational need for cooperation and healthier inter-group relationships.

The development of inter-group attitudinal disposition refers to actions adapted to stimulate workers favourable behaviour, appreciation and acceptance of others, considered as members of outer-groups (Williams, 2010; Kunze et al, 2009). These may involve actions concerned with the restructuring of roles and functions, the redesign or rotation of roles, enriching of the on-boarding process for new employees with values and orientations that address diversity, and the development of training programs projected to equip workers with an enlightened mind-set on the imperatives of collaborating with significant others in the organization (Williams, 2010). Following this position, one could argue that actions concerned with control and the management of diversity are quite distinct from those channelled toward shaping perceptions and dispositions toward outer-groups. Cho and Mor Barak (2008) stated that negative inter-group attitudinal disposition is an emotion-based behaviour, stemming from feelings of

fear, distrust, disregard, of all which produce outcomes of bias, prejudice and aggression toward members of outer-groups.

As an emotion-based factor, inter-group attitudinal disposition is also deeply entrenched in the workers sense of identity (He & Brown, 2013). The categorization of self on the basis of age, religion, tribe and even gender, may to some degree offer the worker some sense of belongingness; however, Akanbiemu (2021) argued that such leads to comparisons especially in the organization; with individuals often comparing their groups against others, and that way, advancing the need to demonstrate superiority and the dominance of their group over others (He & Brown, 2013). The increasing attention to the concerns of diversity and the development of inter-group attitudinal disposition has garnered considerable interest and suggestions on various actions; however, this paper examines three in line with advancing the preferred outcome in workers behaviour – these comprise, workplace acculturation (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008), team development (Margerison, 2001) and leader cultural intelligence (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Team development: Team development describes the various stages involved in the emergence of teams within the context of the organization. Margerison (2001) identified five stages in team development – (a) forming (the expressions of varied expectations and feelings in the emergence of the team), (b) storming (the identification of differences and personality or inter-group conflicts in the development of the team), (c) norming (the structuring of functions and development of understanding and communication between members of the team), (d) performing (team members are able to collaborate and contribute individually and collectively toward addressing related tasks and projects), and (e) termination (in most cases, team functions maybe extended to other tasks even after specified targets are achieved). Team development is considered useful in bridging group differences and in drawing or harnessing the creative capacity linked to workplace diversity (Margerison, 2001).

Workplace Acculturation: Acculturation refers to related actions channelled toward workers adoption of a more dominant cultural system, or value within the workplace. According to Cho and Mor Barak (2008), this action is usually emphasized as a way of addressing feelings of alienation or ostracism in the workplace, resulting from the inability to communicate in the dominant culture language, or the inability to relate effectively with significant others in the organization. As a positive inter-group attitudinal disposition development option, acculturation assures of workers integration within a more dominant system, enhancing workers embeddedness and ensuring that workers are able to function and collaborate substantially within the workplace (Cho & Mor Barak, 200).

Leader cultural intelligence: Leader cultural intelligence can also contribute to the development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition as it identifies with the various culture groups, fairly and equitably within the organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Caposey, 2013). That is to say, culturally intelligent leaders are not discriminant and do not also segregate. Their actions are often based on the alignment of the various existing cultural groups within a more dominant and integrated cultural system that is not tied to any particular group, but which expresses the organizations own values and dynamic features in addressing its market (Caposey, 2013). This way, actions are taken to synchronize workers values with those of the organization and to de-emphasize their loyalty to intra-organizational groups, ensuring that their loyalty lies with the organization itself (Armstrong & Taylor, 2013).

Workplace Connectedness

Connectedness attributes to feelings of trust, mutuality and oneness. Connectedness within the workplace describes the workers sense of placement, feelings of belongingness and unity with other members of the organization. Fapohunda (2013) argued that the connectedness is expressed through the depth of rapport and interdependency apparent in the workplace. This agrees with

Kalla (2005) observation that connectedness enriches the workers experience, offering them friendships, and networks anchored on deeper levels of engagement. More so, studies (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008) suggest that when workers are emotionally knitted and supportive, there is a wholesome position on driving the organizations goals and objectives. That is to say, members over time become more integrated and cohesive in their level of cooperation and approach toward organizational tasks. Similarly, Abdulle and Aydintan (2019) posited that the success and performance of employees does not rely only on their own competencies, but in their capacity to connect and draw from the knowledge and experience of others as well. Abdulle and Aydintan (2019) stated that when organizations are able to build trust and positive relationships in the workplace, they can actually channel such to the advantage of the organization – expressing coherence in their systems and behaviour and consistency in their behaviour. In this vein, connectedness in itself can be considered an inherent capacity which can be harnessed and effectively applied in the coordination and management of the organization. Hakanen and Soudunsaari (2012) posited that such fusion and interrelations within the workplace, creates an abundance of creativity and skills, easily transferred across workers – thus enhancing the flexibility of the organization. This agrees with Kalla (2005) view, demonstrating the imperatives of workplace connectedness to the various levels in the organization; the individual, the group and also the organization itself.

Developing Positive Inter-group behaviour for Workplace Connectedness

Williams (2010) posited that one of the major advantages and benefits of a highly diverse workplace is that, the differences in experiences and ideas, offer the organization a varied and more enriched perspective on the situation of the organization. However, Pahuja et al (2021)

pointed to the importance of harmony even in the expression and integration of such views, stating that it is necessary that such are not expressed on the basis of competitiveness or as a way of affirming one group's superiority over others, but rather in a collaborative way – one that values variety in perception. This agrees with Margerison (2001) opinion that organizations should focus on developing inter-group appreciation and tolerance through team development – with team members drawn from different units, levels, age groups and ethnic groups in the organization. Similarly, Hakanen and Soudunsaari (2012) observed that correspondence and interdependence between groups builds trust, understanding and respect over time.

Studies (Caposey, 2013; Mor Barak et al, 2001) have also shown that the process of acculturation significantly impacts on the perceptions of workers. Their adoption of ideologies, values and even their knowledge of language of other tribes, help in bridging communication differences in the workplace, and reduces workers feelings of alienation. Likewise, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) noted that organizations or leaders who are culturally intelligent and capable of creating and emphasizing on a unique and overarching cultural system, duly adopted by its workers and reflected in their behaviour and relationships (with co-workers and customers), could also effectively address the disparities in their workplaces. Some scholars also agree to this view, noting that the emergence of such a cultural system within the workplace, distinct from individual backgrounds, allows for a functional framework that is cross-categorical and integrating as it provides for a dominant basis for connectedness at the workplace. Within such a framework, feelings of minority groups are addressed as no particular group culture is emphasized over others (Kelvin, 2012).

The culturally intelligent leader is able to build connections and trust with the various cultural groups in the workplace, but most importantly, such leaders offer a non-biased, equity-based and supportive framework to all members of the organization (Kelvin, 2012).

This is only possible when such leaders are able to develop systems that engage all members of all groups in the organization on an equal basis. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) argued that the culture of the organization, in this sense, should represent and emphasize on variety through its policies on equality in opportunities for all groups, collaboration through information sharing and inclusiveness, and also the value for differences in ideas and opinions in decision-making and team work in the organization. Kelvin (2012) stated that in this way, particular group identities should be de-emphasized in the workplace, with reinforcements offered the unification of behaviour and value in the organization through norms, and cultural artefacts.

CONCLUSION

The development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition within the workplace extends beyond the enactment of policies and organizational regulatory measures for controlling and managing workplace diversity. Positive inter-group attitudinal disposition is emotion-based, and draws primarily from the workers social identity and self-categorization. It is therefore imperative that organizations focus on advancing work systems and frameworks that address workers perceptions and level of trust for outer-groups in the organization. Such are imperative for strengthening collaboration and communication within the organization and that way, contributing toward the level of connectedness in the workplace. The development of a positive inter-group attitudinal disposition is therefore such that is premised on aligning the workers values and beliefs with those of the organization, through a de-emphasis of their own personal affiliations with particular groups, thus creating an organizational system that harmonizes workers differences and is able to harness relative levels of creativity and competencies through its effective engagement and development of trust, understanding and connectedness between workers from various groups and even outside the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are put forward in line with the review, and the noted imperatives of the development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition in advancing outcomes of workplace connectedness:

- i. The development of positive inter-group attitudinal disposition should focus on advancing team work within the organization; building on an integrative process where team members are sourced from various levels, functions, tribes and other groups within the workplace. That way ensuring there is a substantial mix of the various groups in the development of teams.
- ii. Organizations should focus on building a more cohesive workforce through on-boarding practices that focus on advancing competencies in related skills such as the dominant cultural language, values and norms – that way enabling workers the capacity to integrate effectively and collaborate with significant others within the workplace.
- iii. The leadership of the organization should focus on advancing a more embracing and integrating organizational cultural system. One that is based on equity and is inclusive in its decision-making process and emphasizes on the alignment of individual values with those of the organization.

REFERENCES

- Abdulle, A., & Aydintan, B. (2019). The effect of teamwork on employee performance in some selected private banks in mogadishu-somalia. *Journal of Business Research Aturk*, 11(3), 1589-1598.
- Akanbiemu, A. A. (2021). Employee Relations, Job Satisfaction and Employee Commitment of Librarians in universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. 16(3).
- Alliant International University (2022). What are the 4 types of diversity. Retrieved from: <https://www.alliant.edu/blog/what-are-4-types-diversity>
- Armstrong, M., & Taylor, S. (2014). *Armstrong's handbook of human resource management practice: Edition 13*. Kogan Page.
- Bambacas, M., and Patrickson, M. (2008). Interpersonal communication skills that enhance organizational commitment. *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(1), 51-72.
- Caposey, P. J. (2013). *Building a culture of support: Strategies for school leaders*. Larnchmart, NY: Eye on Education
- Cho, S., & Mor Barak, M. E. (2008). Understanding of diversity and inclusion in a perceived homogeneous culture: A study of organizational commitment and job performance among Korean employees. *Administration in Social Work*, 32(4), 100-126.
- Ehimare, O. A. & Ogaga-Oghene, J. O. (2011). The Impact of workforce Diversity on Organizational Effectiveness. A study of a Nigeria Bank; *Annual of the University of Petrosani, Economics* 11(3), 2011, 93-110.
- Fapohunda, T. M. (2013). Towards Effective Team Building in the Workplace. *International Journal Of Education and Research*, 1(4), 1–12
- Hakanen, M., & Soudunsaari, A. (2012). "Trust in building high performing teams". *Technology Innovation Management Review*, June, 1-10.

- He, H., and Brown, A. D. (2013). Organizational identity and organizational identification: A review of the literature and suggestions for future research. *Group & Organization Management*, 38(1), 3-35.
- Hume, J., and Leonard, A. (2013). Exploring the strategic potential of internal communication in international non-governmental organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 40(2), 294-304.
- Jayne, M. E. A. & Dipboye, R. L. (2004). Leveraging diversity to improve business performance: Research findings and recommendations for organizations. *Human Resource Management*, 43(4), 409–424.
- Kalla, H. K. (2005). Integrated internal communications: A multidisciplinary perspective. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10(4), 302-314.
- Kelvin K. (2012) Wholehearted leadership and Employee Engagement, *Journal of Management* Volume 6(2) P.P 196-2011.
- Kunze, F., Boehm, S. & Bruch H. (2009). Age Diversity, Age Discrimination, and Performance Consequences – A Cross Organizational Study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(30), 187-192.
- Macleod, A. L. (2013) Impact of workplace diversity and Employee Engagement. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 14,224-247
- Margerison, C. J. (2001) "Team management, team competence". *Team Performance Management: An International Journal*, 7, 117–122.
- Mor Barak, M. E., Findler, L., & Wind, L. H. (2001). Diversity, inclusion, and commitment to organizations: International empirical explorations. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 2(2), 72-91.
- Pahuja, S., Chowdary, K. M., & Mittal, S. (2021). *Critical Issues on Changing Dynamics in Employee Relations and Workforce Diversity* (1st ed.). IGI Global.
- Ruck, K., and Welch, M. (2012). Valuing internal communication: Management and employee perspectives. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 294-302.
- Tewari, U., & Kumar, P. (2019). *Employee Relations at Workplace: Panacea for*. 6(1), 54– 57.
- Timmermans, B., Ostergaard, C. R., & Kristinsson, K. (2011). Does a different view create something new? The effect of employee diversity on innovation. *Research Policy*, 9, 500-509.
- Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2012). Self-categorization theory. In P. Van Lange, A. Kruglanski & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories in social psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 399-417). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications
- Williams, (2010) *Workplace Diversity and Employee Engagement*. *Journal of Applied Psychology* Volume 3(2) pp.96-99.