

## **Gender Diversity and Employee Engagement: A Study of Cable Manufacturing Companies in Anambra State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *There is a seeming consensus among researchers that women are denied several opportunities in organizations, either in the recruitment process or in promotion, thus making a case for discrimination against women in the workplace. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the relationship existing between gender diversity and employee engagement in the cable manufacturing companies in Anambra State. Survey Research Design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 151, due to the manageable size of the population, complete enumeration was adopted. Data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient, and the hypothesis was tested at 5% level of significance. The result revealed that the relationship between the variables is high (.965) and that it is statistically significant at 5% level of significance ( $p$ -value < .05). This implies that gender diversity and employee engagement have a direct relationship. The study, therefore, concluded that a gender-sensitive organization breeds an engaged set of employees. Sequel to this, the study recommended that management of the firms should give equal opportunity to both genders while recruiting as this will make the organizations diversity sensitive and that there should be no discrimination when it comes to training and promotion of employees.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Diversity, Gender Discrimination, Employee Engagement and Vigour*

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### **I. Introduction**

#### **Background of the study**

The performance of any organization is subject to many dynamics and the interaction of many variables; however, employees appear to be the most important of all the variables that help organizations to achieve their objectives. Hence, employees are beginning to be held in high regards in most organizations, irrespective of the industry the organization belongs to. However, as there are many organizations, so also are different employees with different biological and physical makeup. This brings to the fore the concept of diversity in organizations.

Diversity as a concept has been generating a lot of research interest in recent years. This was captured by Rafnsdóttir (2011) who opines that diversity is one of the frequent topics for discourse in modern society, not least among those involved in political decision making and academics. Diversity in the workplace deals with differences in people. Ike and Eze (2013) opine that diversity refers to the experience of human differences and commonalities. Similarly, Daft and Marcic (2008) aver that it is in the manner in which employees differ in organizations. These differences could be in social class, age, education, temperament, skills, competences, religion, tribe and race. Others are gender, experience, colour of the skin and eyes, physical ability, ethnicity, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, values, culture, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance and economic status. Within the context of this study however, the focus is gender diversity and how it relates to employee engagement.

Gender diversity in the workplace deals with how women and men are treated in the place of employment. What the ratio of men to women is in the workplace if given equal opportunity, or are there open and or subtle discrimination against a particular gender in the workplace? An organization where there is an excellent mix of gender is regarded as a gender diverse organization and organization that is dominated by a particular gender is seen as an organization that is not gender diverse or sensitive.

Having an equal number of men and women in the workplace is an often discussed topic in politics, media and business, and it is gradually taking pride of place in academic discussions and studies. Women appear to be at the receiving end of gender bias as many extant literatures have submitted. This previously had some cultural inclination as women have in the past been relegated to playing the role of homemakers; a situation that seems to be changing at the moment. It is evident that traditionally, women were never given equal opportunity with their men counterparts (Anikpo, 2000; Obi, 2001; Mathurttelm, 2005). Yemisi, Olusoji and Oluwakemi

(2012) posit that since cultural factors prevent women from going to school, women have no opportunity to contend with men in the boardrooms because they do not have educational qualification for the top jobs. Also, some jobs are seen as men-fitted like the firms under study whose productive activities are said to require lots of physical and mental strength.

Developed countries have been working to create a gender-sensitive organization by making policies that support inclusion and reduce bias such as gender or colouration. Many initiatives have been set up all over the world to create more gender-diverse organizations (Catalyst, 2014). Fatile, Adejuwon and Kehinde (2011) assert that even with all the efforts to suppress gender bias, prejudice continued to exist as does the glass-ceiling that limits women from enjoying genuinely equal opportunities. Thornton (2014) states that presently, in Western societies, the percentage of women in senior management positions is on average, only around 20%. Women have been fighting this, even in Nigeria, but the fight for gender equality seems to be more pronounced in politics and multinational corporations. Yemisi et al. (2012) posit that women in Nigeria for generations have fought the barriers to progress to any form of authority, like directors of big business organization, CEOs of multinationals, among others.

The level of employee engagement in the organization and to duty is one of the most discussed dependent variables in organizational academic literature as it determines a great deal the performance of the organization. Garg (2014) points out that today's organizations want their employees to be strategic, proactive, initiators, energetic and productively engaged with their work and organization. The engagement of employees is determined by many interactions in the workplace, one of which is diversity. Scholars like Miles (2001) and Harter, Schmidt and Keyes (2002) claimed that employee engagement is dependent upon various factors in the workplace. Robinson (2006) argues that individual differences play a vital role in determining an employee's potential level of engagement. Similarly, Garg (2014) explicates that gender differences have also been found to determine the level of one's engagement within one's workplace.

The Nigeria society is bifurcated into male and female with women outnumbering the men in some areas (Ekong, 2008). However, the male folk seem to be having the upper hand when it comes to employment, especially in manufacturing outfits. Many people posit that women face difficulties getting to top management positions due to seeming gender bias against them. Gender bias results in gender discrimination and the practice of gender inequality. The whole idea implies that women are denied certain rights and privileges in the workplaces due to the way society perceives their status. Okigbo (2003) expressed the view that women rarely occupy essential decision-making positions in the industry. The global view is that only 1-5% of top executives are women, as few women hold corporate board seats (Yemisi et al., 2012).

The studied organization seem to favour the male gender when employing probably as a result of the nature of work being carried out in the firms. It is claimed that men are more productive, have more enduring capability and could work in environments that are not very safe as it is with many manufacturing outfits. Kyalo and Gachunga (2015) opine that organizations prefer to hire male workers compared with women because they are perceived to have better performance ability. This, however, seem to be affecting the engagement of employees in the workplace, especially the very few females in the organizations. The organization appear not to be sensitive to diversity in terms of gender and therefore seem to be uninteresting. The few females there, appear not to be too comfortable at the workplace as male colleagues surround them. A situation which appears to be affecting their level of engagement to duty. It is against the backdrop of the seeming gender insensitivity of the studied firms that necessitated this study.

This study broadly seeks to examine the relationship existing between gender diversity and employee engagement in the studied cable manufacturing companies in Anambra State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the type of relationship that exists between gender disparity and employee vigour.

## **II. Review of related literature**

### **Conceptual Review**

**Gender Diversity:** Gender, in its literal meaning, has to do with the biological sex of an individual. It is the range of differences between men and women, extending from biological to the social. Hence, organizations who are gender-sensitive take these differences into perspective in recruitment, training employees and promotion in the workplace.

When a particular gender is favoured or discriminated against in recruitment or promotion, then it is gender disparity, gender inequality and gender discrimination. The concepts are used synonymously to describe unfair treatment meted out to one gender in relation to the opposite sex. The concepts connote the limiting of the opportunities of one gender in relation to the other. In our society, due to traditional and socio-cultural prejudice, the practice of gender discrimination has put the womenfolk in a very disadvantaged position. Discrimination against women includes different types.

Concerning work and workplaces, there are three different forms. The first is discrimination in employment: opportunities available to women to be gainfully employed are limited due to their gender. The

practice in Nigeria include situations where specific jobs and positions in firms are exclusively reserved for men. Even though the employer does this, there are no rational reasons behind these discriminating practices. The second form of discrimination in workplaces is wage discrimination. The practice of paying women less when compared with their male counterparts discourage women from hard work and could bring damages that are capable of depleting the value of the firm. Wage discrimination can be perpetrated through discrimination in promotions. Promotional discrimination due to gender is the third form of gender disparity in workplaces. This is the practice of limiting promotions due to a worker for reasons of gender disparity. This form of discrimination is the focus of this paper because except when a worker has reached a certain level in his/her career, he/she cannot be appointed into management positions.

Discriminating against women in promotion may be perpetrated by limiting the chances of female staff to undergo training and on the job training, limiting the chances of attending seminars and efficiency courses, as well as, restricting the opportunities of study leaves available to the female staff. Gender-based inequities in organizations are reinforced and justified by stereotypes and biases that describe positive characteristics and therefore, a higher status to the males (Leonard & Levine, 2003). In other words, organizations prefer to hire male workers compared with women because they are perceived to have better performance and ability to manage their jobs (Kyalo&Gachunga, 2015).

Kossek, Lobel and Brown (2005) state that only 54% of women of working age are in labour-force worldwide compared to 80% of men. Furthermore, women continue to dominate the "invisible care" economy, which relates to caregiving and domestic work (Kyalo&Gachunga, 2015). However, according to Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely, Jackson, Joshi &Jehn, (2002), providing an equal job opportunity to women is vital to improving the performance of employees in an organization. However, the proportion of women entering the workforce has increased over the years (Wambui, Wangombe, Muthura, Kamau& Jackson, 2013). The latest census conducted by Catalyst (2011) on Fortune 500's women boards of directors, women held 15.7% of board seats in 2010, which is a 0.5 percentage point gain over the 15.2% they held in 2009. More than 50% of companies had at least two women on their board of directors, and women held 14.4% of executive officer positions which is up from 13.5 per cent in 2009. Further, in 2010, women executive officers held 7.6% of the top earner positions compared to 6.3% in 2009.

The glass ceiling is a term used to describe some subtle events or practices that prevent or discriminates against women in the workplace from elevation to the top of the organization's hierarchy. As a term, glass ceiling first appeared in a 1986 article in Wall Street Journal entitled "The glass ceiling: why women can't break the invisible barrier that blocks them from top jobs (Hymowitz&Schellhardt, 1986; Wood, 2006; Yemisi, 2012). Other authors who popularized the term glass ceiling include Morrison, White and Velsler (1987) and Adair (1994). The generalization of the ideas of these researchers is that the glass ceiling describes a barrier so subtle, so transparent, and yet strong that it prevents women from moving up in the management hierarchy. Catalyst (1990) and Baxter & Wright (2000) explain that the glass ceiling is one of the most compelling metaphors for analyzing inequalities between men and women in the workplace. The expression has been used popularly to portray an image which suggests that although it may be easy that women can get through the front door of managerial hierarchy at some point they enter into the "purgatory", the invisible barrier that hinders any further upward movement (Yemisi, 2012).

### **Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement has been a much talked about concept lately as pointed out by Garg (2014) who posits that that the concept of employee engagement at work has seen increased interest in the new era with the growth in the number of principles, theories and writings, stressing the value of being engaged about one's job, and how organization can benefit from having engaged workers. Employee engagement was first developed by Kahn (1990) who described an engaged employee as a worker that is fully emotionally, cognitively and physically connected with the work rules and regulations. Bakker (2011) echoes this definition when he states that engagement refers to focused energy that is fixed toward organizational goals. Mendes and Stander (2011) aver that engaged employees are the result of positive organizational behaviour and they are crucial to wellness within the organization, increased and sustainable performance as well as high commitment, reduced turnover and increased vigour. Increased employee engagement benefit employers and employees alike (Pitt-Catsouphes&Matz-Costa, 2008).

Employee engagement is the individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). The elusive force that motivates employees to higher or lower levels of performance (Wellins&Concelman, 2006). It is the connection people feel about their work and to their organization that results in higher levels of performance, productivity, commitment, loyalty and vigour (Garg, 2014).

**Vigour:** Vigour is one of the core dimensions of employee engagement as posited by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) who aver that that work engagement is a work-related attitude that exhibits vigour, dedication and absorption. Similarly, Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) explicate that employee engagement is a state defined by vigour, dedication and absorption. Vigour, as it relates to organizations and employees, is associated with energy and strength with which an employee discharges his duty at work.

Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) opine that in different terms, vigour has been labelled as energy. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) state that vigour refers to high-level energy and resilience, investing a great deal of effort in performing tasks and to maintaining such investment in the face of difficulties. It is categorized as experiencing high levels of energy and being mentally resilient during work (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Schaufeli, González-romá, VicenteBakker and Arnold (2002) opine that vigour refers to "high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties". Employees with high vigour usually display energy, zest and stamina when working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). In other words, employees who are engaged at work have a higher level of energy, eager about their work and are engrossed in their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Therefore, vigour in this work is a display of energy, zest, stamina, determination, dedication, and being engaged in the employee's task.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Socio-cultural Prejudice**

The socio-cultural view of gender, which has distributed roles between men and women appear appropriate strand from where a theoretical review of this work can be approached. This socio-cultural view created differences between the sexes. It is by the creation of these differences that women are seen as the weaker sex and needs protection. All the practices today that is regarded as discrimination or bias against women were initially put in place to protect the women. It is to protect the woman that all the hard and odd jobs were formerly regarded as a man's job while less energy-sapping jobs were regarded as a woman's job. The man would go out to struggle while the woman would be at home to maintain the household. The idea is that outside the home, the chances of meeting eventualities that are capable of defying the womanhood are high. Women (especially, young ones) only go to the farm to weed, gather vegetables or harvest other crops in the company of their husbands or men of proven integrity. The fact that everybody, wise or naïve, brave or weak, must have taken shelter in the women's womb before coming into the world is the reason for unequivocal protection of womanhood. This good intention to protect women for their value which has no substitute has today with civilization in place brought to the woman significant limitations to move to top positions and places of high responsibilities.

### **Empirical Review**

Several empirical studies have been carried out by researchers to investigate the case of gender bias against women and its impact on the performance of organizations. Wenjun, Tomokazu and Shoji (2010) investigated gender discrimination in Brazil and firm performance by employing a two-stage bootstrap DEA approach to profit efficiency and testing the implication of the employer discrimination model. The result of their testing showed that the proportion of female employees has a positive effect on firm profit. This is evidenced by the fact that the results of their estimation of the total wage function indicate that a firm employing a high proportion of female workers incurs a lower cost while producing the same level of output compared with a firm employing a low proportion of female employees.

Hashimzade, Muravyev and Rodionova (2010) also in their study, 'Gender bias in hiring, access to finance and firm Performance: evidence from International data', analyzed the effect upon the firm's performance of the interaction between an employer and an employee with the possibility of gender-based bias in hiring. Using a firm-level data of the former Soviet Bloc, their finding is that there is a negative effect of a hiring policy based on individual characteristics other than productivity. Conclusively, their submission is that gender bias in hiring may lead to an inefficient allocation of physical and human resources.

Shwetlena and Katherine (2008) in their study entitled, "Does Gender Matter for firm Performance? Evidence from Eastern Europe and Central Asia", found that even though the female entrepreneur runs relatively smaller businesses, they generate the same amount of profit per unit of revenue as men in ECA. Their submission implies that profit to cost ratio is equal for women entrepreneur and men entrepreneur.

Fatile, Adejuwon and Kehinde (2011) in their paper, 'Gender Issues in Human Resource Management in Nigeria Public Service', explained that because Nigerian public service sector did not make an effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, the public service has not performed creditably in the past. Fatile et al. (2011) aligned poor performance of the public service sector with gender bias perpetrated by military rule in the country in the long past.

Yemisi, Olusoji and Oluwakemi (2012) points out that those women in top positions find themselves in purgatory in Nigeria. In the paper entitled, "women in purgatory: the case of Nigeria women in the

Boardrooms", Yemisi et al. (2012) show that since many male workers do not accept to work under women managers in Nigeria as is the case in Cadbury PLC, there is every tendency that there would be depletion in firm value as woman ascend to top management. This would result from poor performance of the unwillingness to work under female managers.

**III. Methodology**

The study adopts a survey research design which is a design that analyzes people and events through a systemic gathering of data from them. Onyeizugbe (2013) posits that survey design is a method of gathering information about the human population in which direct contact is made with the unit of study. The population of the study consists of 86 employees from CutixPls and 65 employees from Geolis Ltd, all in Anambra state, which is the study area. A complete enumeration strategy was adopted; hence, there was no sampling. Data was gathered through the use of Likert type structured questionnaire and was validated through face and content validity while its consistency level was ascertained using Crombach Alpha technique which gave a reliability coefficient of .82%. A total of 149 copies of questionnaire were retrieved out of the 151 copies distributed, but at the end, 142 copies were analyzed.

**Data presentation and Analysis**

*Table 1: Distribution of responses on gender discrimination and vigour*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA (5)	A (4)	D (3)	SD (2)	UD (1)	Mean
<b>Gender Discrimination</b>							
1	My organization does not favour any gender while recruiting.	9	24	70	33	6	2.98
2	An employee gender as a male gives him an age over the other gender.	45	72	3	18	4	3.96
3	Jobs in my organization are done mostly by men.	67	60	10	5	-	4.33
4	We have mostly men in my organization.	102	30	10	-	-	4.65
5	Women are given equal opportunity in my work place.	23	17	80	13	9	3.23
<b>Vigour</b>							
6	I will put in my best if we have mixture of men and women in my work place.	59	40	20	20	3	3.93
7	I do not care who I work with, provided we achieve result.	39	30	39	30	4	3.49
8	More energy will be put into the work if my organization takes into consideration the workforce mix.	41	51	27	14	9	3.71
9	My effort is effected by how male and women are mixed in my workplace.	56	39	21	25	1	3.87
10	Women put in equal amount of effort in their duties as men in my work place.	12	60	44	20	6	3.37

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

From the responses presented above, and the mean scores whose benchmark is 3 for acceptance, it is seen that all the questionnaire items have scores that are more than 3. This means that the questions are all entrenched in the studied organizations except questionnaire item 1 whose mean score is below 3 (2.98) and therefore not accepted as being valid in the focused firms.

*Table 2: Correlation analysis out*

		<b>Correlations</b>	
		DISPARITY	VIGOUR
DISPARITY	Pearson Correlation	1	.965**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	142	142
VIGOUR	Pearson Correlation	.965**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	142	142

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2018.

Table 2 gives the output of the correlation analysis test carried out on gender disparity and vigour, which are the decomposed variables for gender diversity and employee engagement. The output shows that the relationship between the variables is high (.965) and that it is statistically significant at 5% level of significance (p-value < .05).

#### **IV. Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings revealed that gender disparity significantly influence employee vigor and the position of gender disparity grossly instigate the vigor of employee in CutixPls and Geolis Ltd, all in Anambra state. The findings further stress the position of Fatile, Adejuwon and Kehinde (2011) and Hashimzade, Muravyev and Rodionova (2010). The study therefore showed the evident role of gender disparity/diversity on employee vigor in service delivery in CutixPls and Geolis Ltd, all in Anambra state. Hence, the study draws a conclusion based on the result of the analysis that a gender-sensitive organization breeds an engaged set of employees and thus, gender diversity affects the performance of organizations as engaged employees put in their best to see that their organizations perform well.

Sequel to the findings of the study, the study makes the following recommendations:

a) Management of the firms should give equal opportunity to both genders while recruiting as this will make the organizations be gender-sensitive.

b) There should be no discrimination when it comes to the training of employees and promotion based on gender as what should determine this should be a track record of success as this will be a fillip to improved employee engagement.

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