Diversity And Conflict In Teams A Contigency Approach: The Case Of Mobile Telecommunication Companies Operating In Ebonyi State.

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Abstract
This study focused on diversity and conflict in teams: a contingency approach, with a focus on mobile Telecommunication companies operating in Ebonyi State. Primary data was gathered from a sample of managers and employees. Respondents who worked in mobile Telecommunication companies were accepted to participate in the survey, only if they worked in teams that consisted of at least three members. Respondents had to answer questions assessing the variables described on five-point Likert-type scales. Mobile telecommunication companies such as MTN, GLO and Airtel were selected. Data collected was analysed with the statistical software SPSS 20. A total of 114 members representing 27 different full teams responded to the questionnaire. Findings indicate that a wide array of employee backgrounds means the organization as a whole has more experience and expertise coverage in critical areas that affect the company but often times generating conflict. It is therefore recommended that while companies take cognizance of diversity in their recruitment since it has proven to help in optimum performance of the organization, they should also be ready to resolve conflicts that are prone to occur at any time.
Key Words: Diversity, Conflict, Teams, Contingency

I. Introduction
Diversity refers to the existence of variations of different characteristics in a group of people. Diversity in the workplace is the total makeup of the employee workforce and the amount of diversity included. Diversity refers to differences in various defining personal traits such as age, gender, race, marital status, ethnic origin, religion, education and many other secondary qualities. To better understand and define diversity, we can think about it in a social context. For example, at work, one might interact with coworkers of different genders, age groups, faiths and so on. Likewise, at school, students may come from different socio-economic classes and have different personalities and physical abilities (Amason, 2019). Nowadays, two ongoing trends set the stage for working in and for organisations: first, an increasing amount of work in organisations is done through teamwork rather than by individuals working alone (Ancona, 2019). As Katzenbach and Smith (2020) state "in any situation requiring the real-time combination of multiple skills, experiences and judgments, a team inevitably gets better results than a collection of individuals". Second, the labour market is becoming increasingly diverse due to the mobility of employees and global merger and acquisition transactions. The boost of diversity and the emphasis of teamwork make it necessary for organisations to learn how to use the 'value-in-diversity (Bantel, 2019)'.

In particular, diverging points of view and preferences of team members may result in opposing ideas or approaches to solve problems (Baron and Kenty, 2019). Consequently, diverse teams may confront a considerable amount of intra-team conflict, and it is likely that their members will show different preferences towards dealing with these conflicts.

Even though empirical research has analysed how differences in teams' composition influence team processes and outcomes as well as subjective well-being and attitudes of team members (Kerr, 2019), empirical understanding of the relationship between team diversity and intra-team conflict has been limited thus far.

Although several factors may influence the relationship between diversity and intra-team conflicts, this study focuses on the critical and surprisingly understudied role of the contextual surrounding. Milliken and Martins (2016), emphasised, that diversity "appears to be a double-edged sword, increasing the opportunity for creativity as well as the likelihood that group members will be dissatisfied and fail to identify with the group". Following Katz (2020), we argue that one major weakness of existing diverse-team research is that it fails to provide an answer to the question under which contextual conditions which side of the sword reveals.

Teams are organisational units that are embedded in a larger system (e.g. a company), have fuzzy boundaries, and are therefore connected to their environmental context. Thus, they are not immune against effects from their surroundings, but rather they are influenced by actions that occur outside their boundaries. Consequently, this work aligns with Kellers' (2021) proposition that the relationship between diversity and intra-team conflict is moderated by the contextual surrounding of the teams.

Building on a contingency approach, this study investigates the link between team diversity (i.e. informational and social-category diversity) and intra-team conflicts (i.e. relationship, task and process conflict), considering possible contingencies, i.e. moderating effects of the surrounding organisational context of teams in an emerging economy.

This study focuses on organisational openness and supportiveness as contingencies that may have crucial effects on team processes. It is expected that we find out the diversity-conflict relationship because both variables are believed to strongly influence the way in which people interact and work with each other.

This study provides the foundation for two sets of contributions: First, it adds to the current understanding of how different types of diversity influence intra-team conflicts. Second, this study contributes to an understanding that the relationship between diversity and conflicts is embedded in the organisational context and thus, may be influenced by contextual contingencies.

The Concept of Diversity

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies (Bird, 2019).

Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. It is extremely important to support and protect diversity because by valuing individuals and groups free from prejudice and by fostering a climate where equity and mutual respect are intrinsic, we will create a success-oriented, cooperative, and caring community that draws intellectual strength and produces innovative solutions from the synergy of its people (Bird, 2019). According to Bird;

➢ Diversity" means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve:

➢ Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.

➢ Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own.

➢ Understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;

➢ Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;

➢ Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Diversity includes, therefore, knowing how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are present in other individuals and groups (Clark, 2019). These include but are not limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, and work experiences. Diversity is the beauty of humanity, it makes us unique in various ways possible and it adds colour to team members and projects, if properly managed it brings out the best in team members and better results.

Team diversity and team conflicts

Although quite a lot of research has been done in the field of diversity in teams, relatively little is known about the relationship between diversity and team conflicts and how this relationship is moderated by contingencies on the organisational level (Collins, 2018). Hence, we build on organisational supportiveness and openness literature as potential contingencies moderating this relationship.

The concept of diversity has received ample attention from various disciplines, resulting in several excellent recent reviews of the demography, diversity, team process and performance/effectiveness, and conflict literature exist, which aim at giving possible explanations for the highly inconsistent findings of past team research. Teams that form naturally in organisations use criteria such as similarity, proximity, or familiarity as bases for team formation. This typically results in an over-selection of individuals from similar or shared social networks, which may have more redundant as opposed to diversified knowledge bases, perspectives and experiences (Collins, 2020). Consequently, it is likely that these teams lack diversity, reducing their potential for effective problem-solving, learning and new insights

In order to increase informational diversity in the team, organisations try to actively form cross-functional teams or use techniques such as job-rotation. However, even if organisations intentionally manage team membership, teams often fail to take advantage of the potential benefits of informational diversity. Katzenbach and Smith (2020), found lower team managers' ratings of innovativeness in functionally diverse teams, than in homogeneous ones. Thus, diverse teams are often ineffective at capitalising on the potential benefits of their informational diversity. A possible reason, why teams often prove ineffective at capitalising on informational diversity, may be the fact that "what makes a group informational diverse may also prevent the group from realising the benefits of its informational diversity" (Choens, 2019). For example, it is most likely that team members with an accounting background will differ extremely in identifying and evaluating alternative solutions from members with a research and development (R&D) background. Consequently, teams with functionally diverse members are likely to face higher amounts of task and process conflicts, as disagreements about resources and delegations are more likely to arise. For instance, Jehn, and Manninx (2019) showed that for teams with a high degree of educational diversity (i.e. educational majors) it was more difficult to agree upon how to proceed, than for teams in which the educational backgrounds of members were more similar.

Also, informational diversity may trigger the emergence of relationship conflict (Jehn and Mannix, 2020). This may happen, as sometimes team members might misinterpret or misperceive statements of other team members as attacks that may lead to relationship conflict. Furthermore, Keller (2020) showed that cross-functional teams create stress, which in turn lowers cohesiveness. The presence of increased stress levels in such teams may additionally trigger the emergence of relationship conflicts.

Contingency Approach

The contingency approach to management is based on the idea that there is no single best way to manage. Contingency refers to the immediate contingent circumstances. Effective organizations must tailor their operations to their particular circumstances. In other words, managers should identify the conditions of a task, the requirements of the management job, and people involved as parts of a complete management situation. The leaders must then work to integrate all these facets into a solution that is most appropriate for a specific circumstance. The contingency approach to management assumes that there is no universal answer to many questions because organizations, people, and situations vary and change over time.

The contingency approach to management finds its foundation in the contingency theory of leadership effectiveness developed by management psychologist Fred Fielder. The theory states that leadership effectiveness, as it relates to group effectiveness, is a component of two factors: task motivation, or relation motivation, and circumstances (Clark, 2019). We measure task motivation, or relation motivation, by the Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) Scale. The LPC scale asks the manager to think of the person they least like working with and then rate that person on a set of questions, each involving an 8-point scale. For example, a score of one would be uncooperative, and a score of eight would be cooperative. Fielder believed that people with a higher LPC score try to maintain harmony in their work relationships, while people with a lower LPC score are motivated to focus on task accomplishment.

The theory states that task or relations motivations are contingent upon whether the manager is able to both control and affect the group's situational favorability, or outcome. According to the theory, you can assess situational favorability by three factors:

1.   **Leader-member relations** - This factor addresses the manager's perception of his cooperative relations with his subordinates. In other words, is the cooperation between you and your employees good or bad?

2.   **Task structure** - This factor relates to whether the structure of the work task is highly structured, subject to standard procedures, and subject to adequate measures of assessment. Certain tasks are easy to structure, standardize and assess, such as the operation of an assembly line.

3.   **Position power** - This factor asks if the manager's level of authority is based on punishing or rewarding behavior. For example, does the manger derive his authority from providing bonuses for meeting sales goals or terminating employees for failure to meet the goals?

The combination of leader-member relations, task structure and position power create different situations that have been coined "*octants one through eight*". One can divide these eight situations into three broad categories: favorable situations, intermediate situations and unfavorable situations. According to the theory, each situation is handled the best by either high or low LPC managers. The theory argues that high LPC managers are most effective at influencing employee group behavior in intermediate situations, while low LPC managers are most effective in favorable or unfavorable situations.

II.   Methodology

Primary data was gathered from a sample of managers and employees. Potential respondents who worked in mobile Telecommunication companies were accepted to participate in the survey, only if they worked in teams that consisted of at least three members. Respondents had to answer questions assessing the variables described on five-point Likert-type scales. Data collected was analysed with the statistical software SPSS 20. A total of 114 members representing 27 different full teams responded to the questionnaire. Respondents had a mean age of 31.29 years (SD = 8.51), a mean company tenure of 45.73 months (SD = 63.56) and a mean team tenure of 24.60 months (SD = 36.61); 42.1% of the respondents were women; 18.4% of the participants were team leaders. The team size (including the team leader) ranged from three to seven individuals.

To reduce possible common method bias stemming from item characteristics, such as item context effects, item priming effects or item embedded; the position of items of each construct was automatically altered by the survey software.

To achieve such a 'counterbalancing question order', the position of each item relative to the other items of each construct was altered automatically and thus, different for each respondent. However, items of different constructs have not been mixed, due to complex and possible negative outcomes related to this practice.

The developed questionnaire was pilot-tested with a random sample of participants (N_T = 25) not taking part in the actual survey to ensure the clarity of the questions and instructions. To avoid ethnocentric bias during the design of the questionnaire, the pilot-test sample consisted of individuals from different cultural backgrounds (i.e. from the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Efik, Ibibio, etc). The questionnaire was designed using items in English language from renowned academic journals. On the basis of the received pilot-test feedback, alterations to the questionnaire were implemented where necessary (for example, the introductory texts of each page and some of the labels of the scales were refined and/or modified). Also, the pilot test was used to test if the conduct of the survey in English would be an issue. This was not the case, which can be explained by the fact that all respondents were used to communicating in English in their daily work.

This study extends previous research on the relationship between diversity and team processes to the setting of diversity – intra-team conflict linkages. In general, our findings reinforce the importance of research into a more distinctive understanding of diversity as well as the importance of contingency factors as contextual settings for diverse teams.

Below is a discussion of the implications of key findings in more detail.

III.   Findings

First, this study found that informational diversity has a positive influence on the emergence of relationships and process conflict whereas no significant influence was found for task conflict. Specifically, the non-significant effect on task conflict is very surprising and demonstrated that differences in educational background increased task-related discussions in teams. Furthermore, as knowledge bases differ and disagreements about task-related issues are likely to arise, higher levels of task conflict should be the consequence. However, positive relationships were only found for the effects of informational diversity on relationship and process conflict. One explanation might be that relationship and process conflicts have been triggered by task conflict and were the dominant type of conflict in the respective teams at the point of the survey.

Another explanation might be that due to social categorisation processes on the basis of team members' educational or functional background or the heterogeneity of education, individuals have only little empathy for members of other social categories. Thus, relationship conflict may be the predominant type of conflict. Secondly, it was found that social category diversity will increase task, process and relationship conflict in teams (and thus, predicting a positive effect of social category diversity). According to social identity theory, one may expect that it is likely that individuals group themselves due to social categorisation processes and prefer to interact with members of their own social category. However, the data did not support the predicted relationship and thus, revealed extremely opposing effects of social category diversity.

Therefore, this study suggests that the effects of diversity go beyond simple main effects. To gain a deeper understanding of potential contingencies as contextual surrounding of the diversity-conflict relations, we tested the moderating effects of organisational supportiveness and organisational openness. The results of this study show that effects of diversity on team processes can vary significantly depending on organisational level contingencies. Interestingly, we have not found a significant moderating effect of organisational supportiveness on the diversity-conflict relation. we expected that teams which benefit from a high degree of supportiveness by their surrounding organisational context, i.e. resources, counselling, etc. are able to effectively deal with opposing viewpoints (both social category and informational diversity) and thus, may prevent conflicts to arise. However, our analysis shows that these HR-oriented tools do not moderate the diversity-conflict relation. Our assumption that organisational supportiveness is an important contingency in the diversity-conflict relation is thus, not supported by our data. Second, the data reveal that organisational openness significantly moderates the relation between social category diversity and all types of conflicts. This supports the findings of past research that there are dimensions of organisational cultures that have a considerable impact on team functioning. Contrary to that finding, only a weak interaction effect on the relation between informational diversity and process conflict was found, while effects on task and relationship conflict were not significant. Effects of informational diversity on conflict thus, do not depend on this specific contingency in our study.

However, when interpreting the results of the study, we had to be aware that the effect of conflict in teams is not always dysfunctional. Whereas one strand of research clearly shows that conflict can be detrimental for team performance, another strand of research suggests that conflict can enhance team performance under certain conditions. we found that teams performing well were characterised by low but increasing levels of conflict, low levels of relationship conflict, with a rise near project deadlines, and moderate levels of task conflict at the midpoint of group interaction". It is expected that companies should explicitly inform their employees about the value that lies in diversity, as pro-diversity beliefs can positively affect the performance of diverse teams. In summary, a more nuanced understanding of when what type of conflicts turns out to be fruitful or not, is needed.

The results of this study show that effects of diversity on team processes can vary significantly depending on organisational level contingencies. Interestingly, we have not found a significant moderating effect of organisational supportiveness on the diversity-conflict relation. We expected that teams which benefit from a high degree of supportiveness by their surrounding organisational context, i.e. resources, counselling, etc. are able to effectively deal with opposing viewpoints (both social category and informational diversity) and thus, may prevent conflicts to arise. However, our analysis shows that these HR-oriented tools do not moderate the diversity-conflict relation.

The result also suggests some preliminary implications for practice. The finding that organisational openness moderated the relationship between social category diversity and all three types of conflict shows that managers and/or organisations might be able to influence the emergence of conflict in teams by intentionally creating organisational cultures that impede conflict in teams. Diversity was positively related to relationship conflict may be crucial for team managers or organisations in order to effectively manage employee's differences in informational background. If it is possible for team managers to predict the effect of team diversity on the emergence of conflicts in teams, they might be able to prevent conflicts by implementing appropriate team techniques or by creating a context that impairs the appearance of conflict.

Significantly, a more nuanced understanding of when what type of conflicts turns out to be fruitful or not, is needed. Contingencies; quantitative methods could then be used to test the effects against a larger sample. Also, future research might investigate the effects of organisational culture in more detail, as significant moderator effects of organisational openness on the emergence of process conflict has been found in the present study. Hence, further knowledge regarding other dimensions of organisational culture could be revealed. Additionally, further measures of organisational contingencies, such as business strategies, business sector, and similar, could be included. Finally, future studies should explicitly test for performance effects when analysing the relation between diversity and conflict to strengthen the implications for both theory and practice. Despite these limitations, a major strength of our study was its design. Whereas most past studies were limited to single organisations and/or teams and did not test diversity effects across different organisational contexts, this study covered teams from various ethnic backgrounds, business sectors and organisations.

IV. Conclusion/Recommendations

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the link between diversity and conflict in teams using contingency perspective. Mobile Telecommunications operating in Ebonyi State was the area of the study.

A primary benefit is that a wide array of employee backgrounds means the organization as a whole has more experience and expertise coverage in critical areas that affect the company. Similarly, discussions typically produce a broader range of ideas when employees have diverse backgrounds. Additionally,

companies that serve a diverse population or a global audience can more adequately serve that diverse market with employees that can speak the language and relate from a cultural standpoint.

It is therefore recommended that companies should take cognizance of diversity in their recruitment since it has proven to help in optimum performance of the organization.

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