NIGERIAN CULTURE: A BARRIER TO THE CAREER PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This article explores the effect of culture on women's career progression in Nigeria and how Nigerian organisations can incorporate some of the issues raised here in addressing their need for talent. It leaves one with the question- How does the Nigerian culture influence women in the society which in turn becomes a barrier that limits women in the workplace? It is necessary to say that though there is awareness of this inequality of women who work in Nigeria, understanding the Nigerian culture can place its human resource management practices in context. It is expected that the viewpoints raised in this article will help highlight some of the Human resource management issues in Africa's most populous country. Taking these issues in context can play a role in increasing the productivity of women in Nigeria. This is paper is aimed at exploring culture which is a barrier to the career progress of women in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, Culture, Women, Gender diversity, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, as well as other countries within sub-Saharan Africa, businesses face challenges to attract and retain talent women within the organisation. Nigeria, which is a multi-cultural society that attracts global talent flow, Nigerian businesses must find a way to manage the diversity that comes with these talents. This gained the attention of researchers such as Fajana (2009) who noted that Nigeria is a society that has abundant labour and scarce talent scattered across different tribes, religions and background. One can argue that this puts business executives at cross roads who understand the benefits women bring to the workplace on how best to manage the cultural sensitivities that may come from get women on board. Robinson and Dechant (1997) who in their study found out that business executives in organisations are beginning to see managing the diversity initiatives in their organisation as the right thing to do and argue that there is a need to ensure that the workplace is diversity friendly.

This has business implications which. For instance, Ashton and Morton, (2005) argued, the pointed out that businesses who get the right employees at the right time create for their organisations success in the long term. Organisations are recognising this and managing people resourcing strategies that recognises diversity and women employees is crucial to ensure that the business goals of the organisation aligns with how the organisation managements the employees' talents which sees the organisation use their talent available at their disposal to achieve competitive advantage. For HRM practices, as Armstrong (2016) views it, a strategic and comprehensive approach is what Nigerian organisations needs to support its national growth. This article goes to introduce Nigeria and its current problems and explores how and why this research is significant to Nigeria. The socio-demographic environment of Nigeria, a key development, economy and other indices are also discussed.

An overview of Nigeria

As the most populous black nation Nigeria is an oil producing country that is situated in west Africa. It has acknowledged as the populous black African nation with a steadily growing population of 183 million (nigerianstat.gov.ng, 2016) which currently is estimated at 190.27 million (Worldometers, 2017). Nigeria has an abundance of natural resources, especially hydrocarbons. It is a country with enormous potential which has been attributed to the large population, its skilled and educated elite.

Figure 1.0: Map of Nigeria and its geographical location in West Africa

Source: Google Map 2017

Nigeria was a former British colony and gained its independence from Britain in 1960. Uzoigwe and Nwadialor (2013) point out that in its current state, it is 'conglomeration of multi-ethnic groups and religious affiliations engendered by European imperial powers' (p. 69). These multi-ethnic groups are made up different cultures and Olueze (2000) acknowledges that there are at least 250 ethnic groups which translate to a significant diversity in language and the culture of the country. Amongst these ethnic groups, the Hausa and Fulani are most populous and politically influential. They make up 29% of the population, the Yoruba make up 21%, the Igbo make up 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, the Tiv 2.5% (CIA fact book 2017) while other minority ethnic groups make up the rest. The official language spoken is English. However, across the different six geopolitical regions, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are widely spoken. The average Nigerian believed in a higher power or God, and this was acknowledged by BBC (2004) in a study across ten countries. As such faith shapes the Nigerian society. Islam is the largest religion at 50%, followed by Christianity 40% and indigenous beliefs at 10% (CIA fact book 2017).

Nigeria, as shown in Fig 1.0 above, is located in West Africa, and it shares borders with the Republic of Benin to the West, the Republic of Niger and Chad to the North, the Republic of Cameroon to the East and has a coastline with the Gulf of Guinea which is part of the Atlantic Ocean. The Nigerian state since its formation has been through a lot of social turbulence which has threatened its nationhood. These include the Nigerian-Biafra civil war of 1967-1970 where the Eastern Region broke away (Achebe 2012). Since then, there have been religious crises between Christians and the Muslim majority.

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The most recent are the Boko Haram plaguing the North-Eastern region of the country with occasional attacks in other parts of the country. The Niger Delta region has not been left out of these crises. There has been a renewed militancy championed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in 2016 who have increased their attacks on oil plants and pipelines which have led to a fall in oil production and distribution worsening the economic problems of Nigeria. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, there are vast crude oil and gas reserves which have over the years contributed to building the Nigerian state. The Niger Delta communities regularly face environmental issues because of contaminated land and polluted fishing waters which these militants say has led to underdevelopment and increased poverty.

Nigeria relies on oil as the primary source of foreign earnings and finance for the government. However, in the light of the falling oil prices, the Nigerian state is going through its worst economic downturn in over a 10 years as inflation has grown to 18.72% in January, 2017 a record in recent years and in March 2017 has slightly reduced to 17.26% (cbn.gov.ng, 2017). This has led to slumping in government revenues, and Nigerian Bureau of Statistics has acknowledged this revealing that the country's economy shrank by 0.4% year-over-year. Nigeria has always been a nation that is attractive to businesses as result of its abundant resources such as significant labour, oil/petroleum wealth (Akinbami, et al., 2001) which is likely to make Nigeria grow to become one of the largest economies in world. Having looked at the Nigerian state and its current problems the next section looks at the Nigerian culture.

Culture and Nigeria

Culture has been defined in different ways by different authors and Schein (1985) argues that in defining culture in any society, it has been refer to a system of shared meanings. Groseschl and Doherty (2000) point out that culture is a set of beliefs and assumptions that holds a group of people together. It is important here to say that the national culture of Nigeria has been extensively looked at by Hofstede and this will be explored here using the dimensions to understand how this influences society and the barriers women face in work. Hofstede (2001) argued that the profile of any society can be understood using a set of dimensions which gives an insight into how the norms and values shape their institutions which in this case will look at barriers women face in work in Nigeria.

Fig 1. Hofstede five dimensions of Nigeria; Source: geert-hofstede.com/Nigeria (2017)

Power Distance

This is very high in Nigeria and demonstrates that there is a likelihood that this can account form why women are likely to accept that they must carry out stereotypical roles that Olowe (2007) argues that have been used in the Nigerian society to limit women to roles that focuses on procreation and childcare are used as grounds for controlling and excluding them. Nigeria scores high on this and this portends that most the society may accept this inherent gender inequality.

Nigeria scores high on this dimension (score of 80) which means that people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy in an organization is reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat. The national culture also plays a role here. One can argue that the authority of top management has been supported by the hierarchical system that has been bureaucratic and this to a very large degree influenced the role women play in organisations. This is consistent with the work of Hofstede (2017) on Nigeria that shows there is a large power-distance culture in the country.

Individualism

Nigeria is a collectivist society and to means that, group ties are strong. This could be support the use of networks in getting women into work. There is a link in the use of networks and Perceptions of Corruption in Nigeria as it is Ranked 136 out of 176. One can argue that Fajana et al. (2011) pointed out, there is a reliance on ethnicity, religion and gender to determine who gets employed in Nigeria which often implies expected loyalty in return.

Masculinity

Nigeria is a masculine society which is can account for some of the values that are visible in the workplace. Olojede (2004) found out that in Nigeria, the societal stereotyping supports the socialization of women to become less competitive than men.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Nigeria scores above average here and this must do with the way the society deals with issues that confront them. In this case, there is a tendency for the general society to be rigid towards removing some of the barriers and challenges that women face getting into work in Nigeria to become more tolerant, providing workplace support for women.

Long Term Orientation

Nigeria has a low score and this means that there is a great respect for traditions and culture. This could imply a tendency to remain stuck in traditions making it difficult to support a cultural shift in supporting women in the workplace.

Women in Work- the Nigerian context

There have been an increasing number of women going into work and careers across the developed societies and this number has been ever increasing. For instance, in the UK, the office of national statistics (ONS) noted that the employment rate for women was 69.1% while men were 79.2 % which was the joint highest in the UK since the records began

(ons.gov.uk, 2017). It is interesting to point out that despite the contextual differences, an increasing number of women working in Nigeria have shown a steady increase in recent years.

Fadayomi (1991) argues the increase of women's participation in the Nigerian labour force was a direct result of the move from a rural economy to an urban economy and points out that the participation of women Nigeria's labour force still leaves a lot to be desired as it has not led to an increase in higher level roles for women. This is also comparable to studies carried out by Burke and Nelson (2002) that found out that in UK women in senior leadership roles stood at 5% and in Malaysia this stood at 5.4%. However, Haywood (2007) noted that the number of women in Nigeria out of the labour market was twice in comparison to men.

It has been observed that in the Nigerian society the labour market has been evolving and Fajana (2009) notes that Nigeria has been confronted with several Human Resource Management challenges. This has included encouraging women to play an active part in Nigeria's labour force to address its talent needs. Estimates of women's participation in the Nigerian labour market according to the World Bank (2014) stands at 42.4% and it is interesting to note that this figure experienced a steady growth from 34.1% in 1990 to a record peak of 42.9% in 2004 and there are concerns over the recent decline.

There are arguments that the cultural values of the Nigerian society have shaped the participation of women in the Nigerian Labour market. Nigeria is a Masculine society which is very collectivist as such its HRM practices will be influenced by the cultural practices. Onyejeli (2010) noted that in Nigeria, there notable levels of inequality amongst the genders when it comes to the number of women in work in comparison to men but she argues that this has been encouraging as among similar countries, Nigeria has the lowest number of women who are not working. A recent report that by the National bureau of statistics (NigerianStat) puts the population of Nigeria as at 2015 at 183 million people of which women constituted 49.5% while men made up 50.5% of the population.

It is important here to acknowledge nigerianstat.gov.ng (2016) that pointed out that women in Nigeria are disadvantaged in comparison to men in getting opportunities for paid employment and noted there were barriers that limited women in Nigeria from active participation in the workplace. Fajana et al. (2011) in their work argued that the cultural practices of the Nigerian society played a key role in the access women had to work. Fadayomi (2015) rightly pointed out how the increase in the role of women could make a difference and noted that while the representation of women at work in Nigeria has improved marginally, in comparison to other developed countries, it is relatively behind.

It is important to highlight that a lot of studies has been carried out to raise awareness of the disparity in the number of women in work in Nigeria. For instance, Aina (2009) found out that while there was increase in the number of women who got into paid employment, there often faced institutional segregation and few women attained managerial level positions in Nigeria. Ogbogu (2010) contends that in Nigeria, this was down to the stereotypical nature of the society where women were viewed with negatively and were rarely considered for management positions as the cultural practices of the society is entrenched within the work place.

In Nigeria, there has been an increase in level of women in employment however as Onah and Anikwe (2016) pointed out that in for instance Nigerian Universities the patriarchal order that exists in the society means that women have no representation in the decision-making processes that goes on in the workplace. It can be argued that the culture of the society which is has a

high degree of masculinity becomes a barrier to women as it discourages any active participation in the decision-making process. For instance, in a study carried out by Tijani-Adenle, (2016) who tried to explore the representation of women in the Nigerian press, it was found that these new outlets were re-enforcing traditional gender roles and norms and they did little to confront/challenge them. This demonstrates and highlights the realities that women face in Nigeria as well as similar societies.

The Business Case for Women Involvement in the Nigerian Workplace

Having looked at the contextual involvement of Nigerian women in work, it is important to draw parallels from studies that have been carried out and evidence based on the need for diversity. Nigerian businesses are challenged to it an imperative in the workplace as part of their HRM practices to develop strategies to manage the workplace environment as such there is a need to justify a business case to put diversity management at the forefront of the talent management. For businesses, there is a justification to ensure the diversity as it is a strategy to achieve competitiveness as businesses are about profits. It can be argued that this has been supported by the earlier findings of studies carried out by researchers such as (Armstrong et al., 2010; Evans, 2014) which justifies the business case for diversity management in Nigerian businesses.

These studies found out that diversity management resulted in a higher labour productivity and resulted to reduction in voluntary employee turnover. It can be also argued that having a diverse team of employees where women are given equal chance as men would enable work teams become better at solving problems as they can bring creativity to problem solving as the workforce is heterogeneous.

Boussebaa and Morgan (2008) cross-national study is crucial in understanding how challenging it is to manage talent across national borders and in the UK where a significant talent comes from diverse countries, it is important that inclusivity is embraced. On the other hand, with a diversity management strategy in place, businesses will also comply with government legislation and policies which has recognises the increasing number of women who are actively working in the UK. Gender diversity has become increasingly important in organisation. In a study by Close the Gap (2016), they found out that it increased the pool of available talent for staff. This improved the governance of organisations and decision makings which led to improvement in staff retention. Cassell (1997) had earlier acknowledged that there has been an increase in the number of women who have entered management even though this has not been high but for businesses give the changes in the working demographics. This can also contribute to improving the public perception of the business as most businesses have diverse customers which can be of public relations benefit.

The business case of diversity has superseded the moral case and has led to a disregard for the ongoing historical inequality that has been in existence. Syed and Özbilgin (2009) contend that integrated strategies for managing diversity were rare and the activities carried out towards managing diversity were piecemeal. This it can be argued represented irregularities in the policies and activities of some organizations in ensuring that there was some organizational justice done to address these historical inequalities of diversity management within the Nigerian State. Going by these evidence-based studies, one can argue that Nigerian HRM practitioners can do a lot better to make their practices gender friendly.

HRM Practices in Nigeria

The practice of human resource management is still in its infancy and this has been influenced by the socio-cultural makeup of the Nigerian society**.** Fajana et al. (2011) pointed out that Nigeria still faced HRM challenges which mean that the chances of an individual to get employed depended on a lot of variables.

The National Bureau of Statistics (nigerianstat.gov.ng, 2016) acknowledged that women can enhance their contribution and potential towards building Nigeria's economic and social development if the inequalities and obstacles that they face can be removed. This resonates the views of Fajana (2009) who was quick to point out that Nigeria is an African country that has challenges with abundant labour and scare talent. The HRM practices in Nigeria can do more to attract, develop, deploy and retaining best the best female talents.

In Nigeria, studies such as (Ovadje and Ankomah, 2001; Fajana, 2009; Fajana et al., 2011) acknowledge that HRM practice in Nigeria is increasingly becoming more challenging. Prospective employers face a challenge to identify the right talent and for the higher educational institutions, it producing graduates that are employable is a challenge as the emphasis has shifted from numbers to producing students who are employable especially with changes in the marketplace and the need to develop potential employees who are skilled (Fajana et al., 2011). To confront this HR challenge, organizations in Nigeria try to develop their employees on the job to reflect their workplace needs.

Barriers Women Face in the Nigerian Workplace

Adapting the work of Jimoh et al., (2016) on the barriers that Nigerian women face, this article will look at some of three barriers that Nigerian women face in the workplace;

Recruitment Policies and Procedures: In Nigeria, the HRM practices are still in infancy (Fajana et al., 2011) and more needs to be done to ensure that there are more women employed on the job who can be supported to grow on the career. Matching them closely with mentors who can support them as they progress on the job is crucial to bringing down some of the barriers to the inequalities that begins at the point of recruitment.

Nepotism: Fajana et al. (2011) further noted that there issues with family members getting the jobs in preference for skilled persons (issues around nepotism) which can be addressed with more openness and objectivity of the recruitment and selection process. Omisore and Okofu, (2014) found out in a study carried out that there was a lot of interference and manipulation when it comes to recruitment and selection in Nigeria. They argued that factors such as ethnicity, nepotism and a complete disregard for efficiency was a concern and this had consequential effects in the competence of employees who were recruited.

Sociocultural Perceptions: Within the Nigerian society, women are expected to conform to certain gendered roles and Tijani-Adenle, (2016) found out that these perceptions are promoted which over time becomes a barrier to women's participation in the work place. Okewole (1997) pointed out that within the Nigerian society, there is a general belief that some employment activities are only meant to be undertaken by men and not women and views such as this shared by a large majority of the society buy into these views.

Gender Discrimination: There is no doubt that as Jimoh et al (2016) pointed out the discrimination that occurs because of gender is a barrier that can account for the imbalance in the Nigerian workforce and this can be addressed. For instance, in Nigeria, Men get more support from the management in carrying out their work as opposed to women which eventually sees the men advances to higher level positions.

Although there are a lot of barriers that limits the equal participation of women in the Nigerian labour market, these few barriers highlighted here demonstrated that there are challenges to the women's involvement that even begins at the point of entry in the job.

Research and Practical Implications

This article is written to serve all those who have an interest in the equal participation of women in the workplace as well as those with a keen interest to gain an insight into the barriers women face within the Nigerian Labour Market. Nigeria is yet to fulfil its economic potential, yet despite the employment opportunities it offers, women still find it difficult to pay active role as such Nigeria has been labelled 'Abundant labour, scarce talent' (Fajana, 2009).

However, there have been limited empirical studies carried out to link context specific dimensions and how it influences labour force participation of women, earnings and inequality such as (Ogwumike et. al., 2006). This article has added to this especially in the light of culture and the HRM practices in a developing country in sub-Saharan Africa. This makes this paper unique in nature. The discussions generated from this article would help develop constructs that would add to the literature on the context-specific nature of barriers Nigerian women face. Addressing them in the light of the cultural context will enable and create facilitating conditions for inclusive workplaces which will help bridge the gender inequalities that exist.

The contributions of this paper will hopefully generate interest in further research on HRM practices in organisations in Nigeria. This article makes a case for debates and in-depth research in Nigeria's HRM practices which would confront the socio-cultural complexities and ambiguities that organisations in Nigeria face in integrating the role of women and ensuring the career progression in an inclusive workplace.

This paper contributes to addressing the gap in literature that highlights the dominant barriers to the career progress of women in Nigeria. This paper points out the continuous lack of empirical studies that seeks to understand how Nigerian culture is a significant barrier to the career progress of women which in turn impacts on their role as economic players in Nigeria's development. This paper as such contributes to the field of HRM research by challenging HRM researchers as well as practitioners in Nigeria to challenge their existing practices which has been influenced by the culture of Nigeria by taking into consideration the barriers they face and rethink their role in keeping these barriers.

CONCLUSION

This article looked at the current level of participation of Nigerian women in the workplace and identified some of the barriers they face because of their gender. It can be argued that these barriers played a key role in the imbalance of the proportion of women who took part in Nigeria's economic activities. The national culture of the Nigerian society was crucial in

demonstrating how the shared values and beliefs of a people can provide a frame that reflects shapes the Nigerian women's participation.

As Fajana et al. (2011) pointed out in their work, the socio-cultural diversity of Nigeria has influenced the HRM practices in Nigeria There is no doubt that the cultural diversity of Nigeria has shaped its human resource management (HRM) practices which enables women play an active participation in employment. However, the weaknesses in the HRM practices in Nigeria must be addressed to address this inequality to in gender participation. This article recommends that more women can be supported to education; mentoring and where necessary increasing the awareness levels those women can be professionals just like men.

For Nigerian businesses, they should have a coherent strategy to manage diversity and increase women participation in the labour market. There is considerable evidence (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009) that within some organisations, there has been a lack of attention for structural and historical inequality to address the challenges of gender diversity and ethnic diversity in the workplace. Nigerian organisations should have a culture that is inclusive. It can be said that diversity management is crucial to the management of talent and the HR function in organisations have a role to play by linking training and promoting team building across the diverse teams in the workplace.

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