

ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY AND WORKPLACE COHESIVENESS IN TELECOMMUNICATION FIRMS IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Diversity is a growing concern for organizations today. This follows the challenge posed by the distrust, lack of collaboration and poor relations expressed between groups or departments in the organization. This study investigated the role of organizational equity in workplace cohesiveness in four GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational design, with data generated using the questionnaire instrument 98 workers in four (4) telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. A total of three hypotheses were tested, addressing the relationship between organizational equity and three measures of workplace cohesiveness – social relations, task relations and communality. Findings from the test shows that organizational equity has a significant and positive association with workplace cohesiveness, that way, enhancing outcomes of social relations, task relations and communality, specifically in GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. It was concluded that through an increased focus on creating fair and transparent work systems, reflective of organizational equity, the management of GMS telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State can effectively advance their cohesiveness outcomes.

Keywords: Workplace cohesiveness, diversity, group behaviour, social exchange theory, organizational equity

INTRODUCTION

Work systems have evolved significantly in recent decades (Jones & Doviodio, 2018). Much of these evolutions owe to the emerging shifts in technology, culture and business values; such that have influenced outcomes such as workplace relations (social and task) as well as communality. Oyefusi (2022) opined that most multinational companies, specifically large telecommunication firms, in Nigeria today face operational strain from the poor level of integration and lack of cohesion they experience. According to Oyefusi (2022), the related concerns of workplace cohesion stem from the increased levels of diversity, and group politicking that MNCs now deal with due to the changing dynamics in their environment and their operations as global organizations. These emerging operational challenges, as Oyefusi (2022) pointed out, stifle organizational performance and progress through a warped emphasis on group interests that are detrimental to the organization's success in the long run.

Research (Dover et al, 2020; Shaban, 2016; Hussain et al, 2021) on workplace cohesion identifies with the structuring of roles and functions, given organizational goals. However, cohesion, as some studies (Bless & Burger, 2016; Cortina et al, 2013) also point out, follows the permeating sense of membership and affiliation workers feel and express in their behaviour and relationship with others. Thus, it could be task-oriented or social-oriented in nature; most importantly, the workers agree and see themselves as one in the organization. According to Berger (2018), workers' self-categorization occurs in multiple layers of which the organization, unlike primary or first layers such as gender and age which are biological, is secondary and similar to categories based on beliefs, religion and economic status. While primary layers or levels of self-categorization anchor on biological or other evident features that distinctively define groups, Berger (2018) affirmed that secondary levels or layers of self-categorization are often influenced by the individual's beliefs and perceptions; such that invariably shape their disposition towards others.

Luo (2015) examined the role of trust development in the cohesion of virtual teams. The outcome of Luo's (2015) study, validated the observations of Hogg (2012) on the impact of perceptions on the behaviour and disposition of individuals toward others they view as being members of out-groups. According to Luo (2015), when members of the organization share positive assessments and perceptions of other groups, they become more receptive, supportive and accommodating of them. Jone and George (2016) went further by examining the experience and evolution of trust in the workplace, and its impact on outcomes of cooperation and healthier levels of teamwork in the organization. Their research addressed underlying concerns of transparency and inclusion in work settings – affirming yet still to the significance of perceptions, in this case, that of workers' treatment in the workplace.

The abundance of literature on workplace cohesion-related outcomes such as collaboration, information sharing, communality, task and social relations (Cui et al, 2018; Aishwarya & Karuna, 2020; Hussain et al, 2021), appear to have centred on antecedents such as compensation, and the use of other diversity management policies in reinforcing task and social ties in the workplace. However, the prospect of workers opening up to collaborating and agreeing with co-workers with evident differences in demographic characteristics, values and beliefs, is such that draws on a wide base of possible antecedents or explanatory factors and conditions – one of which is the perception or experience of equity in the workplace (Kozlowski, 2017; Butler & Waldroop, 2021). However, not much has been done in line with establishing the nature of the relationship between organizational equity and workplace cohesion, leaving a knowledge gap. The aim of this research is therefore to investigate the role of organizational equity in workplace cohesiveness of telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The research questions for this study are as follows:

- i. What is the relationship between organizational equity and social relations in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the relationship between organizational equity and task relations in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the relationship between organizational equity and communality in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory is one of the many (personal identity theory, role identity theory and others) which address perceptions of self within social settings, groupings or frameworks that impose on behaviour, choices and decisions. Propounded in 1979 by Tajfel and Turner (Berger, 2018; Manning, 2020) the social identity theory focuses on understanding individual disposition and feelings of membership toward groupings based on shared features, beliefs and norms and the extent to which such features or attributes shape or determine their attitude toward individuals or members of another group. Hogg (2012) posited, that from the lens of the social identity theory, the identity of the individual is such that is fused with his or her beliefs, values and social standing – characteristics which in turn determine the individual's self-categorization and how they interact with others, within and outside the group.

Given the focus of this research which is the relationship between organizational equity and workplace cohesiveness, the social identity theory applies based on shared perceptions of treatment and the workers' interpretation of working conditions as it applies equally across all groups in the organization (Hogg, 2012). According to Berger (2018) secondary levels of self-categorizations, unlike the primary levels, are fluid and allow for cross-carpeting or cross-identification where members of a group begin to identify and relate better with others, based on shared realities and experiences. Shaban (2016) observed that organizational equity levels the playing field for workers, enriching their positive disposition toward others and their trust in the management of the organization. This is a precursor to improved communication, collaboration and a more favourable

and healthy disposition toward out-group members – thus enhancing outcomes of workplace cohesiveness.

Organizational equity

Equity is a social as well as economic phenomenon (Choi et al, 2015; Aryee et al, 2004). Studies (De Clercq et al, 2013; Griffith et al, 2006) identify equity as involving actions that detail fairness and transparency in the distribution of resources (financial or non-financial) as well as in the proper or fair treatment of individuals or groups. According to Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001), equity is a fundamental feature of justice and within the context or setting of the organization, it is a defining quality of unbiased and fair leadership. Research has over the years identified organizational equity as key to leadership effectiveness as it fosters trust and confidence in management and the leadership of the organization (Aryes et al, 2003). However, some have questioned the rationality behind organizational equity, especially since the premise for its justification borders on the perceptions of fair treatment and justice – factors subject to distortion from misinterpretations from involved parties (Hosmer & Kiewitz, 2005); yet still it is imperative to understand that the application of organizational equity dwells on the context or action as well as interpretation (Aryee et al, 2004). According to Aryee et al (2004), while actions offer a more objective and substantial stance on organizational equity, perceptions are subjective. This is why managers and professionals must operate based on codes of conduct and principles which are clearly defined and structured to reflect the ethical values of the organization – such as in the areas of organizational equity and professional conduct. Hence, while individual interpretations could be poisoned or distorted based on personal bias, self-interest or poor cognitive faculties, the collective or organization as a whole, would provide a more accurate and objective approach toward discerning or interpreting organizational equity, based on the standards and principles collectively agreed upon (Jones & George, 2016; Iqbal & Bilali, 2018). Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) also noted that conceptualization of equity differs significantly from that of equality. Whereas the subject of equity advances a position of fair treatment and justice, it nonetheless identifies with the variations expressed as a result of the differences in competencies, experience, qualifications and even effort. Equality on the other hand offers an umbrella approach which makes no distinction and which can be viewed as practically illogical for most organizations.

Workplace Cohesiveness

Diversity offers a mix of benefits as well as challenges to MNCs (Shaban, 2016; Mueller & Cronin, 2009). In comparison, benefits include increased levels of creativity and a rich mix of competencies, experiences and capacities, while the challenges of diversity cover inter-group friction and conflict, unhealthy competition and striving between groups. The need for cohesiveness within the organization stems from its imperative as a precondition to supportive and collaborative work environments, where ideas and information are easily transferred and the organization can effectively manage its vulnerabilities through shared responsibilities and the flexibility of roles (Manning, 2020). Bless and Burger (2016) described workplace cohesion as the strength of the bond between individuals and groups in the organization and the extent to which this bond necessitates healthy and progressive levels of agreement, cooperation and unity in the workplace. According to Bless and Burger (2016) cohesion is the outcome, whereas cohesiveness describes the inherent qualities and attributes expressed across individuals and groups that support and allow for bonding or outcomes of cohesion.

Workplace cohesiveness thus refers to the various conditions, dispositions, perceptions and attitudes of workers or groups that reflect their willingness, and openness toward collaborating with and supporting out-group members (Bless & Burger, 2016). Jones and George (2016) posited that it is an internalized state, manifested or expressed through the nature of relationships (task and social), or communality between individuals and groups in the organization. More so, it dictates how receptive workers are toward the development and growth of other groups, significantly distinct

from theirs even if it's within the same work environment. Cohesiveness thus necessitates cohesion and as such identifies with the underlying factors mirrored in the fears or concerns individuals have or hold concerning other groups in the organization. Similarly, Shaban (2016) affirmed to the criticality of cohesiveness in effectively bridging the cultural differences that exist at the micro-level of the organization; enabling a more integrated system of values and beliefs at the organizational level, necessary for a unified and systemic approach toward the achievement of organizational objectives.

The Relationship between Organizational Equity and Workplace Cohesiveness

The problems, expectations and interests of groups in organizations differ significantly. Organizational equity is a demonstration of the appreciation of this difference and the effort channelled toward ensuring each group's unique needs are met without bias and prejudice (Hussain et al, 2021). The effective satisfaction of group needs increases members' sense of belongingness and identification with the organization as a whole. Research (Arashpour et al, 2020; Oyefusi, 2022) shows that when policies are designed to drive the overall interest of the organization rather than those of specific groups, there is a stronger tendency for integration and harmony as assumed frontiers and group boundaries are reduced and interests become interwoven. Arashpour et al (2020) in their study, advocated for improved communication and transparency procedures and organizational operations. Arashpour et al (2020) noted that most leaders fail to understand that when it comes to diversity, the challenge lies in the boundaries which have been erected in the process of self-definition and self-identity. These boundaries in turn shape the behaviour and disposition of the individual toward those considered as external or out-group members.

Bless and Burger (2016) argued that identity boundaries can be extended or contracted; depending on the experience of the individual. Bless and Burger (2016) posited that when individuals perceive acceptance, fair treatment and support, they tend to be more open and at ease with their context; thus, they identify with groups that appear to not only share their physical, biological or ideological orientation but such that also share their context and are supportive of them. This follows Igbal and Bilali's (2018) observation that experiences and shared realities, especially for individuals and groups, facilitate understanding and have a positive effect on bonding. The expression of equity in the workplace is such that demonstrates the significance of all groups; thereby assuaging concerns of marginalization, favouritism and bias; and creating an atmosphere or climate of fairness and commitment to all groups, including minority groups in the workplace. Thus, in line with the review of the literature, the following hypothetical statements are posed:

- H1: Organizational equity is positively associated with social relations in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria
- H2: Organizational equity is positively associated with team relations in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria
- H3: Organizational equity is positively associated with communality in telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

METHODS

This study is designed as a correlational study; and adopts a deductive strategy in its approach toward its investigation of the variables (Coghlan, 2011; Creswell, 2003). The study anchors on a quantitative methodology; one structured in line with testing the stated theoretical foundation – the social identity theory, as it applies to the context of the telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. The population for the research comprised 98 workers from four selected GSM telecommunication firms operational within the geographical context of Bayelsa State. Workers included in the study are such that are permanent and drawn from the middle, and junior ranks of the telecommunication firms. Data collection for the study was carried out using a structured questionnaire. Instrumentation for the variables was based on existing research. The first variable – organizational equity, was measured using five (5) items from previous studies (Dion, 2000), while the second variable –

workplace cohesiveness is examined using its three measures, namely – social relations, task relations and communality, using five (5) items each as adapted from previous research (McLeod & Von Treuer, 2013).

Findings of the Study

The findings for the study – detailing the distribution for the variables and the relationship between organizational equity and the measures of workplace cohesiveness. The distribution for the sample characteristics was also addressed in line with providing a detailed background on the referents of the study.

Sample characteristics

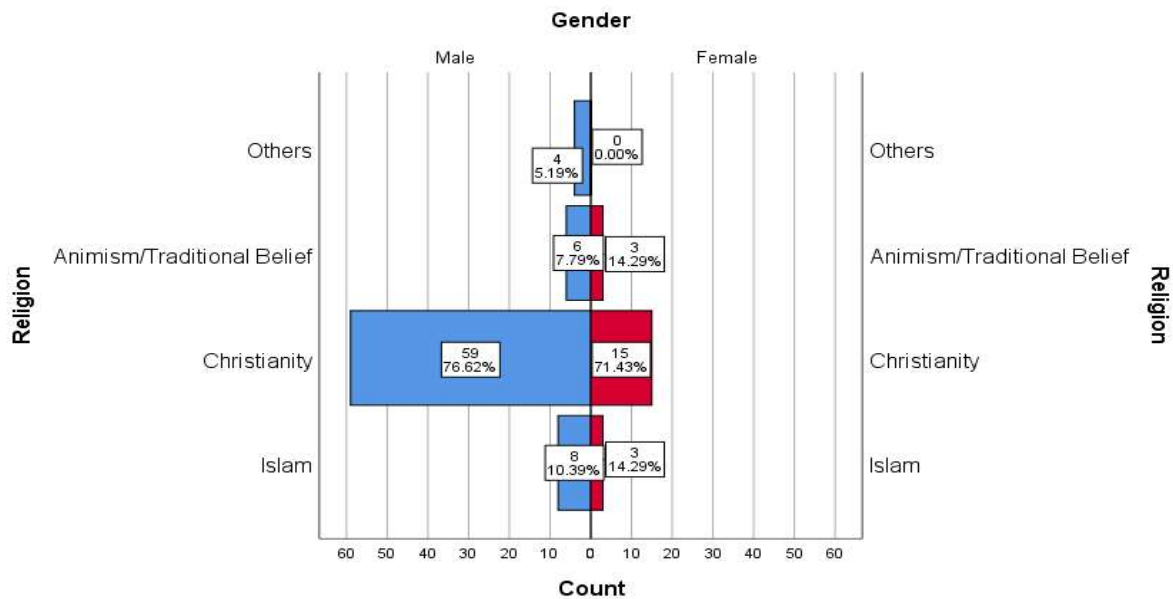


Figure 1: Gender and religion population pyramid distribution

The distribution for gender and religion distribution for the study as illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrates a more dominant male (79%) population as compared to the female (21%) where Christianity is revealed to be the most dominant and preferred religion for both groups. This outcome demonstrates the dominance of Christianity across the context of the investigation.

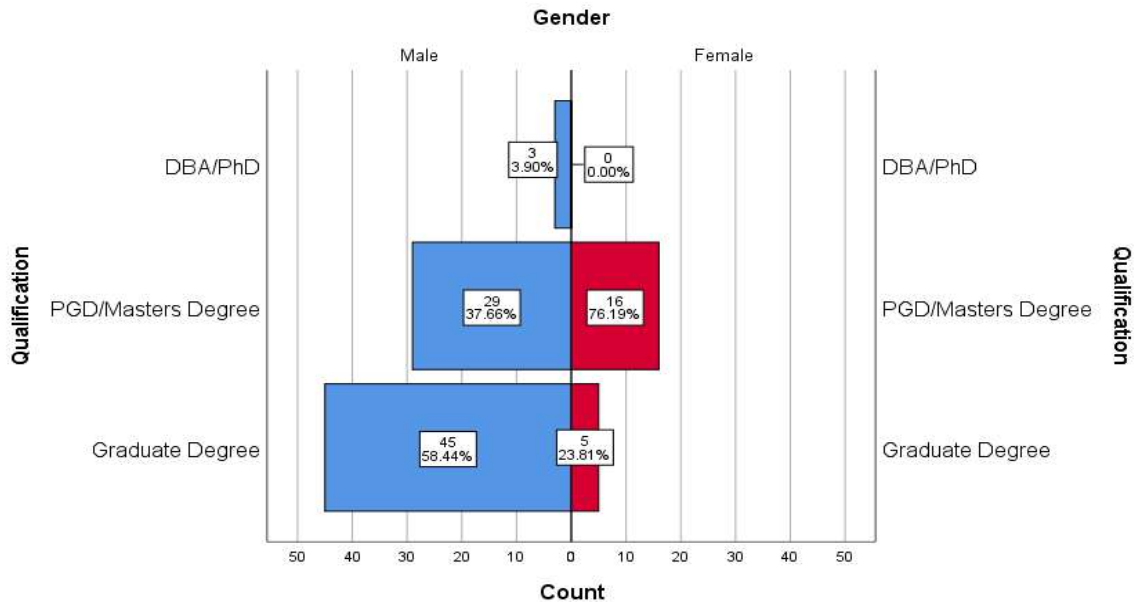


Figure 2: Gender and qualification population pyramid distribution

Figure 2 addressed the distribution of gender and qualification for the four (4) telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. Based on a total distribution of which the male accounted for 79% and females 21%, the study showed that most of the male participants (58%) had attained graduate degree certifications. The male distribution was also observed to be the most dominant in other qualification categories as well – PGD/masters and DBA/PhD categories. The distribution points to a higher proportion of males across all three categories.

Univariate Distribution

Table 1: Univariate distribution for the variables

		Organizational equity	Social Relations	Task Relations	Communality
N	Valid	98	98	98	98
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.5429	3.5408	3.7510	3.7000
Std. Deviation		.93102	1.02995	.73502	.90372
Skewness		-.916	-.946	-.428	-.697
Std. Error of Skewness		.244	.244	.244	.244
Kurtosis		-.576	-.626	-1.261	-.796
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.483	.483	.483	.483

Source: Research Data (2023)

The univariate distribution for the variables (table 1) illustrates aggregates that, based on the adoption of the five (5) point Likert Scale, indicate that participants for the study affirm their organization's expression of organizational equity, as well as characteristics such as social relations, task relations and communality in the workplace. Evidence affirms the distribution of the variables as attributes, substantially reflected in the behaviour of the organization, and of the nature of the interaction between the groups that are captured within the framework of the four telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State.

Test for Hypotheses

Table 2: Correlation for organizational equity and workplace cohesiveness

			Organizational equity	Social Relations	Task Relations	Communality
Spearman's rho	Organizational equity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.469**	.762**	.368**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98	98
	Social Relations	Correlation Coefficient	.469**	1.000	.789**	.887**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	98	98	98	98
	Task Relations	Correlation Coefficient	.762**	.789**	1.000	.675**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	98	98	98	98
	Communality	Correlation Coefficient	.368**	.887**	.675**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	98	98	98	98

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

Source: Research Data (2023)

The relationship between organizational equity and the measures of workplace cohesiveness is revealed to be significant and positive. This agrees with the hypothetical statements for the study and thus affirms the role of organizational equity as significant in outcomes of social relations (rho = 0.469 and P = 0.000), task relations (rho = 0.762 and P = 0.000) and communality (Rho = 0.368). the findings in this vein, establish the relationship between organizational equity and workplace cohesiveness as positive; suggesting that there is a link between the practice or manifestations of organizational equity in the workplace and the extent to which individuals and groups in the telecommunication firms are willing and open to positively relating on a social, task and communal basis.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings affirm the significance of organizational equity in enhancing positive inter-group attitudes and disposition toward out-group members, that way contributing to outcomes of social relations, task relations and communality in GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. The observed association between organizational equity and workplace cohesiveness demonstrates the imperatives of organizational equity in building a more collaborative work environment where individuals and groups are more communicative, willing to share information and also more supportive of the well-being and development of out-group members. Thus, the findings reiterate the views of previous studies (Hussain et al, 2021; Shaban, 2016; Bless & Burger, 2016), on the extent to which perceptions of fairness as a shared reality, positively shape the perceptions of workers and influence their bonding with others in the workplace.

The evidence of this research clarifies the criticality of focus channelled toward expanding personality boundaries and creating a more integrated work system where inter-group relationships are reinforced and strengthened (Berger, 2018), this also agrees with De Clercq et al (2013) position on the use of fair treatment and transparency in enriching social ties in the workplace. Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) pointed to the related actions and practices of ethics and equity as not only useful in setting examples and for ensuring healthier and more conducive workplaces, but also for instilling within the psyche of the organization, diversity values that allow for cooperation and the progress of all groups in the organization. The findings in this vein, attest not only to the significance of the relationship between the variables but also offer insight on the substantiality of

behaviour and actions that demonstrate the prevalence of equity in the telecommunications firms as well.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this research point to the veracity of the social identity theory in explaining and predicting individual as well as group behaviour within the context of telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State. The theory is in this sense justified in the sense that its tenets are shown to be valid and useful in advancing a more cohesive and integrated workplace. As Berger (2018) pointed out earlier, bonding occurs as a result of shared experiences and a perception of others as trustworthy and reliable. Related conditions that offer such, increase the individual's sense of oneness and their feelings of connectedness with others that occupy the same context or framework. However, as Aryee et al (2004) argued, this is only possible where there is a non-biased and fair approach to how groups are treated and the extent to which group interests are not elevated above organizational interests.

The practical implications of the findings point to the need for the leadership of the GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State to be more attuned to the growing diversity management needs of their organizations. It is important to maintain workplace cohesiveness, human resource policies and structures must be such that allow for integration, collaboration and most importantly, transparency in the treatment and coordination of the various groups or functions in the workplace (Sharma & Jain, 2013; Butler & Waldroop, 2021). The leadership or management should focus on bridging differences and creating an organizational culture that is flexible and infuses key attributes and qualities that support and advance, on fair and unbiased terms, the interests and well-being of all groups, departments or functions in the telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from this investigation affirms the significance of organizational equity in stimulating conditions and work atmosphere, capable of enhancing positive individual and inter-group perceptions and relationships. This study has demonstrated that through improved or increased levels of organizational equity, the management of GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State can reinforce the strength and quality of cohesiveness in their workplace – enhancing outcomes such as social and task relations, as well as communality. This position thus establishes organizational equity as capable of predicting and effectively addressing the challenges associated with workplace cohesiveness in the GSM telecommunication firms in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

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