Abstract

The advent of diversity and inclusion management has seen the enactment of several legislative instruments and policies in various nations. However, to date, organizations encounter challenges in their quest to achieve inclusion in a diverse environment. This paper brings to fore the antecedents of diversity management and the challenges encountered by organizations within a diverse environment such as sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In this regard, this paper argues that a literacy culture that goes beyond legislation and policies should be encouraged to put muscle behind the process of ensuring inclusion in organizations in SSA. Literacy culture may be more receptive since it breaks down legislation and policies to the simplest form, preventing imposition and resistance. Validating this argument, an in-depth literature review is employed to contribute to the debate. To this end, individuals in organizations in a diverse environment such as SSA, equipped with the needed literacy in diversity management may turn to be more receptive to legislation and policies. This process may enhance the management of diversity and inclusion in organizations in SSA.

Introduction

An individual’s ability to appreciate, interact as well as collaborate across various cultures has become a critical tool in the 21st century. This is more crucial in a diverse environment where culture is one of the greatest determinants of differences in society (Belfield 2012). In this regard, the appreciation of the various cultures in a diverse environment will enhance the sense of belonging and foster inclusion. Further, organizations in a diverse environment will exhibit similar characteristics since it is a microcosm of the larger society. Literacy culture or cultural literacy was popularized by E.D. Hirsch Jr. in 1987, describing it as one ability to be literate in his or her culture (Arkansas State University 2018). In effect, literacy culture is crucial for the appreciation of oneself and identity (Gómez-Estern 2010). However, in a diverse environment,
individuals must appreciate others’ culture to appreciate the differences therein and create the needed inclusion.

Due to the importance of inclusion in organizations and societies in recent time legislations and policies have been enacted to ensure efficiency and productivity (Mor Barak 2014). Although this approach has created the needed sensitization, it normally fails to speak to the core issues such as culture. To ensure the sense of belonging, which is a critical element in the management of diversity and inclusion, it is worthwhile for individuals to extend their cultural literacy into that of others. In this regard, interaction will become cordial and less offensive in a diverse environment. Furthermore, an individual who is both literate in his or her culture and that of others can interact effectively and understand others to create a sense of belonging, translating into inclusion.

**Overview Diversity and Inclusion Management**

The management of diversity to ensure inclusion has become a necessary tool in the quest to obtain efficiency and productivity in organizations (Urmila and Bagali 2018) and the larger society. This enforces the assertion by Mor Barak (2015) that diversity and inclusion “make business sense”. Diversity is referred to as the visible and inviable differences found in an organization or society (Daya 2014). On the other hand, inclusion is attained when differences are recognized and appreciated and utilized to obtain a common goal (April et al. 2009; Giovannini 2004).

Specifically, diversity in an organization is aptly described as follows:

“*Workforce diversity refers to the division of the workforce into distinct categories that (a) have apperceived commonality within a given cultural or national context and that (b) impact potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace, and promotion prospects—irrespective of job-related skills and qualifications.*” (Mor Barak, 2014; 136)

The differences highlighted in the description has the potential to impact positively or negatively on organizational outcomes. Recently, as indicated earlier, nations have worked towards creating a conducive work environment through legislation and policies (Mor Barak 2014). In this regard,
disadvantaged groups are gradually becoming part of the labour force. Also, diversity has been embraced by organizations and this is evident in the content of their websites (Anderson and Billings-Harris, 2010). However, the full benefit of diversity will be obtained if the sense of belonging is established and everyone is integrated into the mainstream, rather than been exposed to discrimination and an unfavourable work environment (Mor Barak, Cherin and Berkman, 1998). It is worthwhile to note that the sense of belonging goes beyond legislation and policies, more subtle but critical elements such as culture should be taken into consideration in the quest to create an inclusive organization. The appreciation (literacy) of culture is crucial, this is evident in an individual’s social construct, which determines whether rules and regulations in an organization will be receptive or rejected (Appiah and Adeyeye, 2021). Per this notion, literacy culture plays a critical role in a diverse environment regarding diversity and inclusion management. More importantly, culture turns to influence behaviour and being culturally literate makes one relate to others in a better way and prevent friction. Therefore, literacy culture enforces the assertion that a diverse group can come up with superior creativity or decision (Cunningham, 2007; Gruenfeld et al., 1996; Phillips et al., 2004)

Turning our attention to inclusion, it is also explained as:

“The concept of inclusion-exclusion in the workplace refers to the individual’s sense of being a part of the organizational system in both the formal processes, such as access to information and decision-making channels and the informal processes, such as “water cooler” and lunch meetings where information exchange and decisions informally take place.” (Mor Barak, 2014:155)

The concept of inclusion is driven by two main elements; belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Culture portrays identity and it is premised on uniqueness. Therefore, an individual culture should be recognized and appreciated for the sense of belongingness to be established. The sense of belongingness reflects an individual's perception of being part of the larger group. To this end, literacy culture which is a concept of having an in-depth understanding of an individual’s culture will assist in effective communication, leading to a deep sense of belongingness and inclusion.

**Brief Overview of Sub Sahara Africa**
The geographical location of the societal context under discussion lies south of the Sahara on the African continent (United Nations 2008). The region constitutes various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups (Achebe, 2000; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003; Baldick, 1997). Further, the diversity in SSA is premised on beliefs and traditional systems, reflecting issues such as gender imbalances where mostly women are seen to be subservient (Richmond and Gestrin, 2009). This characteristic determines how individuals relate with others and therefore, requires literacy culture to ensure effective interaction to attain inclusion.

The appreciation of one’s beliefs enhances effective communication and assist in navigating through cultural differences. This underscores the importance of individuals within the society not to only understand their cultural beliefs but that of others as well. Understanding others culture promotes cordiality and increases the sense of belonging since an individual will be able to prevent friction when interacting with others. In this regard, interaction among individuals in a diverse environment without cognizance of their culture or beliefs and traditional systems may lead to the lack of a sense of belonging and prevent inclusion and productivity. SSA may benefit from literacy culture due to its diverse nature or may be affected negatively if it is not embraced.

**Challenges in Managing Diversity in SSA**

A peculiar challenge identified in managing diversity in SSA is the lack of adequate literature that speaks to the societal context (April and Blass, 2010; Pelled et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006). The paucity of literature indicates that the phenomenon is not widespread within the region (Kaggwa et al. 2013). It is, therefore, crucial for more studies to be conducted within the region to unearth hidden attributes which prevent the needed inclusion and impede productivity. An aspect of the complexity within SSA may be the lack of understanding of the culture of individuals who are of different beliefs and traditional systems. Hence the need for literacy culture to be seen as a critical element in this regard. This approach enforces the need to properly manage diversity and inclusion as put forward by Appiah, Achemfour and Adeyeye (2018). Further, the uncertainty found within SSA (Munene, 1991; Ugwuegbu, 2001; Zoogah and Nkomo, 2012), may be mitigated by entrenching literacy culture since it can foster inclusion.

Literacy Culture
The shift towards globalization and inclusivity in diverse environments requires individuals to be multidimensional in interacting with others. In this regard, literacy culture should be central to organizational dynamics. More practically, literacy may be described as the process of gaining an understanding of a concept, process, or theory. Further, culture can be described as the thinking pattern that binds a group of people together set them apart from others. Therefore, culture reflects the uniqueness of individuals and determines what is appreciated or rejected. Subsequently, literacy culture may be described as an in-depth understanding of the cultural dynamics within which an individual finds him or herself. Juxtaposing it to diversity and inclusion management, literacy culture enhances efficiency in interaction or communication in organizations. Efficient interaction or communication may be a critical element to foster belongingness which translates into inclusiveness in a diverse organization or society. Interaction or communication through the lens of culture is receptive since it touches the core of an individual’s social construct (Appiah and Adeyeye 2021). Consequently, literacy culture may serve as a critical tool to enhance inclusion and productivity in organizations as well as the larger society since it equips individuals to relate cordially.

Conclusion

Literacy culture per its description makes interaction among individuals’ cordial in a diverse organization or society since differences are identified and appreciated. Legislations and policies enacted to ensure inclusion in organizations or societies may not necessarily speak to the social construct of individuals. However, the in-depth understanding of other cultures within the organization or society may reduce the complexity of managing diversity and inclusion since it assists in effective interaction. To this end, an individual who is culturally literate in his or her culture and that of others other cultures will be able to promote integration effectively and create the needed sense of belonging to foster inclusion.

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