

## **Effect of Workforce Diversity on Employee Responsiveness: Study of selected public organization in South East, Nigeria**

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjhrm.2013/vol12n6113>

Published August 04, 2024

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**Citation:** Etalong T.A., Chikeleze, F.O., and Okwueze F.O. (2024) Effect of Workforce Diversity on Employee Responsiveness: Study of selected public organization in South East, Nigeria, *Global Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.12, No.6, pp.1-13

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**Abstract:** *Workforce diversity is essential for the functioning of organizations, particularly in the context of public organizations. The South East region of Nigeria boasts a heterogeneous workforce, with individuals from many origins making valuable contributions to the public sector. Nevertheless, a significant issue arises with the employees' limited comprehension and recognition of workforce diversity. This could result in misunderstandings, prejudices, and disputes among employees, ultimately impairing both individual and organizational performance. This study employs a descriptive research methodology to investigate the influence of workforce diversity on employee responsiveness, 2000 respondents were purposively selected across South East, Nigeria. The study enquiries centre around the influence of diversity on prompt communication, problem-solving proficiency, adaptability to work circumstances, and collaboration among employees. The findings indicate that workforce with a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints contribute to a greater number of inventive solutions and imaginative concepts. Moreover, personnel with diverse origins provide varied cultural perspectives and sensitivities, which promote an inclusive atmosphere that supports open communication.*

**Keywords:** workforce, diversity, employee, responsiveness, south east, Nigeria

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Workforce diversity has become a critical aspect of organizational dynamics, particularly in the context of public organizations where inclusivity and representation are essential. South East, Nigeria, represents a diverse workforce environment with individuals from various backgrounds contributing to the public sector. It is suspected that, there is a potential problem concerning the lack of understanding and appreciation of workforce diversity among employees within the selected public organizations in South East.

This lack of awareness may lead to misunderstandings, biases, and conflicts among employees, which could negatively affect employee performance and the overall organizational performance. Letasina (2016) expressed dismay at the fact that some public organizations see workforce diversity as an attempt to divide employees along religious, age, gender, moral, and educational lines, and that this has lowered employee commitment and output. The public sector under study does not give the issue of diversity much thought because non-performance indicators including demographic and educational background, regional balance, godfatherism, ethnic and religious affiliation, gender, and age are used in the hiring process to find the best match candidates. When prospective talent is rejected during the recruiting process because of the issue of indigenous people, particularly the State Civil Commission, it deprives the Commission of best brains. However, a diverse staff allows for the effective use of various skill sets and the cross-pollination of ideas, which advances the organization and raises standards for the provision of high-quality services. Hence, the objective of this research is to examine the impact of workforce diversity on the performance of an organization.

### **Empirical Review**

Research on the impact of demographic and educational diversity on employee responsiveness yields mixed results. Choi (2013) found that a higher proportion of racial/ethnic minorities and women in managerial positions can negatively affect job satisfaction, but this is moderated by diversity climate.

Riordan (1997) also found that similarity in race-ethnicity within workgroups can influence attitudes and perceptions. However, Benuwa (2019) and Khan (2019) both found a positive relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance, with Benuwa specifically highlighting the significant impact of educational diversity. These studies indicate that the presence of diverse demographics and educational backgrounds among employees can have both beneficial and detrimental effects on their responsiveness. However, the overall influence of diversity on responsiveness may be affected by factors such as the climate of diversity and the context of the workgroup.

Lydia et al (2023) provide evidence of how salary and career management techniques affect staff performance in the Trans Nzoia County administration. Sanyang and Othman (2019) found that workforce diversity characteristics are strongly correlated with organizational performance. Effectively managing diversity in the workplace is essential for improving productivity and creating a competitive advantage.

Sharma & Srivastava (2022) found that there is a moderate correlation between workforce diversity and employee performance. They also noticed that the perception of diversity's impact on performance is consistent across different demographic variables, and that there is a good attitude towards diversity in the workplace. Nwahanye & Nicholas (2021) argue that employee performance serves as a mediator for the impact of gender, age, ethnic, and educational background diversities on organizational performance. The mediation is comprehensive in terms of gender and educational background diversities, but only partially addresses age and racial diversities. The findings challenge the assumptions of the similarity-attraction theory about the indirect impact of educational background diversity on organizational success. Andoh, Ghansah, Okogun-Odompley, and Benuwa (2019) conducted a study which found that workplace diversity has a considerable impact on employee performance. Specifically, educational diversity was found to have a more pronounced effect compared to other diversity characteristics. Employee performance in universities is highly influenced by age and educational diversity, but gender and ethnicity diversity have no impact on performance. Larasatie, Korhonen & Gutierrez (2024) have found that educational variety has a considerable impact on employee performance, as it allows employees to apply their unique technical knowledge. Hamza, Saher, Areeba, Sami, and Ali (2024) have found that the presence of a diverse workforce and the empowerment of employees have a beneficial effect on organizational commitment.

Additionally, job satisfaction plays a key role in mediating the relationship between workforce diversity, employee empowerment, and organizational commitment. Graf & Nikzad-Terhune (2023) observed that having a diverse educational background can greatly benefit individuals, their relationships with others, and their economic growth. Ramshankar and Thomas (2023) demonstrate that employee engagement, diversity and inclusion enhancements, and general increases in employees' imaginative and creative talents are interconnected. In a separate study conducted by Bartolj (2023), it was found that companies with employees possessing a wider range of specialized skills compared to their competitors experience advantages in terms of both business expansion and the extent of their trading activities.

Ushara in the year 2023 the presence of a wide range of educational backgrounds leads to notable enhancements in staff responsiveness. Multiple studies have demonstrated that organizations with greater workforce diversity tend to achieve higher levels of success compared to those with less varied workforces. Specifically, a heterogeneous workforce can result in enhanced decision-making, problem-solving, and creativity inside the organization (Barak 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

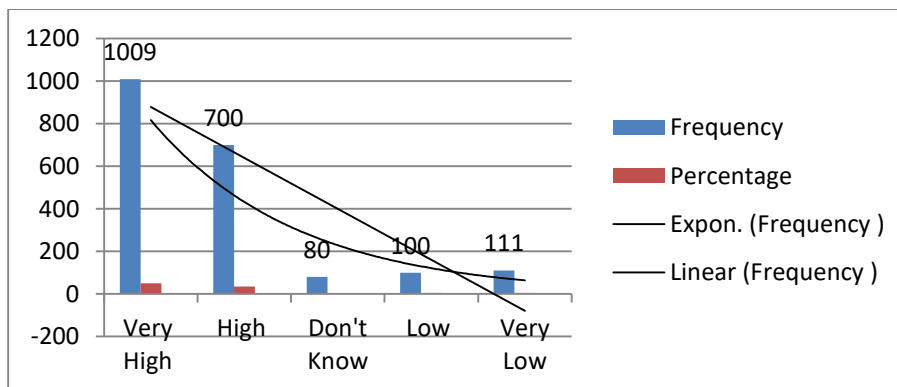
This study adopted the descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a form of investigation that seeks to provide a detailed account of the attributes of a population or phenomenon under examination. It primarily addresses the issues of who, what, when, where, and how, excluding the question of why. This design is utilized to gather information regarding the present state of the phenomena and to depict "what exists" in relation to variables or conditions in a given setting.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Research question

To what extent does workforce diversity affect employee responsiveness?

**Research Question 1: To what extent does workforce diversity affect employee responsiveness in the following areas?**



**Figure 1: Timely communication in the work situation**

Source: Field Survey 2024

From figure 1 above 50.45% of the respondents noted that diverse teams bring multiple perspectives, which lead to more innovative solutions and creative ideas. This variety in thinking can streamline problem-solving processes and improve the quality of communication by ensuring multiple viewpoints are considered, thereby leading to timely communication with regard to work situation.

35% of the respondents observed that employees from diverse backgrounds bring different cultural insights and sensitivities. This can lead to more respectful and effective communication, reducing misunderstandings and fostering an inclusive environment that encourages timely and open dialogue.

4% of the result shows that some of the respondents do not know if workforce diversity affects timely communication with regards to work situation. While 5% and 5.55% noted that the impact of workforce diversity on timely communication with regards to work is low and very low respectively.

**Table 4.1: Ability to solve work related problems**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
Very High	1200	60
High	574	28.7
Don't know	25	1.25
Low	101	5.05
Very Low	100	5
Total	2000	100.0

**Source: Field Survey 2024**

From the frequency table above, 60% of the respondents are of the view that workplace diversity affect employee responsiveness positively in the area of solving work related problems, as it introduces variety of perspectives as diverse teams bring different viewpoints and approaches to problem-solving, which can lead to more innovative and effective solutions. It also brings about broader skill sets- where employees from varied backgrounds often possess different skills and experiences, which can complement each other and enhance the team's overall capability.

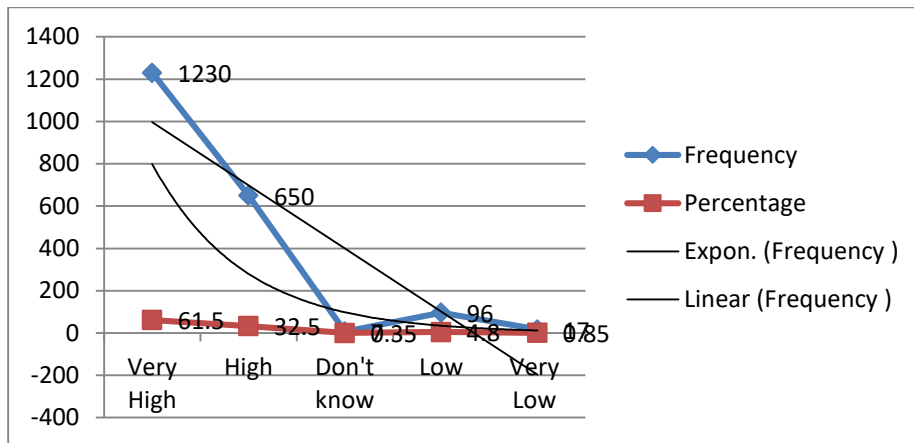
28.7% of the respondents also observed that workplace diversity as it relate to employee responsiveness is improves decision making, as diverse team is more likely to consider a wider range of options and anticipate potential issues, leading to better decision-making. It also ensures creativity and innovation, diversity fosters creativity by encouraging the exchange of unique ideas and perspectives, which can lead to groundbreaking innovations in solving work related problems to foster the attainment of the overall objectives of the organization.

1.25% of the respondents opt that they don't know if workplace diversity enhances ability to solve work related problems as some workers are indifferent about issues that comes up at the work place if it don't affect them direct. They tend to show less interest in the issues as they are not directly affected and it will not benefit them in the long run.

Lastly, 5.05% and 5% of the respondents lamented that workplace diversity have negative impact on the ability of employee to resolve work related problems due to communication barriers pose by diversity as employees from different social grouping find it difficult to communicate effectively with each other when the need arises. All this breeds cultural and individual differences

in work styles and perspectives while creating potential serotypes, thereby making conflict resolution difficult.

Overall, workplace diversity enhances a team’s ability to solve work-related problems by bringing together a rich array of experiences, skills, and perspectives.



Source: Field Survey 2024

Figure 2: Adaptability to work situations

61.5% of respondents revealed that, diverse teams are generally more adaptable to change because they are used to working with different viewpoints and approaches. This can be particularly valuable in rapidly changing environments.

32.5% of the answers show that an inclusive workplace where diverse employees feel valued and included is more likely to foster collaboration and mutual support, enhancing the organization’s overall adaptability.

0.35% of the respondents noted that they don’t know while 4.8% and 0.85% are of the opinion that the effect of workforce diversity on adaptability is low and very low.

**Table 4.2: Collaboration with others in the workplace**

Options		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very High	1671	83.55
	High	200	10
	Don't know	0	0
	Low	90	4.5
	Very Low	39	1.95
	Total	2000	100.0

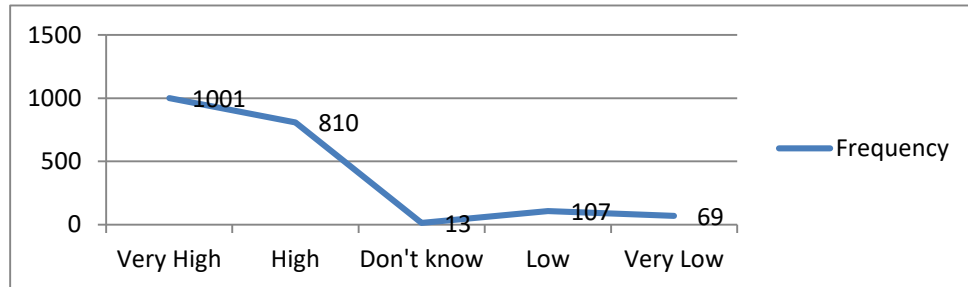
**Source: Field Survey 2024**

**Table 4.2** shows how workplace diversity brings about collaboration among employees. This is seen in various forms and ways, 83.55% of the respondents noted that workplace diversity brings about collaboration among employees in the areas of enhanced Communication: In a diverse environment, employees must communicate effectively across cultural and experiential boundaries. This necessity improves overall communication skills and encourages open dialogue, leading to better understanding and teamwork. It also enthrone inclusive environment for proper collaboration as a diverse workplace fosters an inclusive culture where all employees feel valued and respected. This sense of inclusion boosts morale and engagement, encouraging employees to contribute more actively and collaborate more willingly.

10% of the responses observed that workplace diversity encourages broader skill set for smooth collaboration; diverse teams often possess a wider range of skills and knowledge. This broad spectrum of expertise allows for more comprehensive solutions to problems and better performance on complex projects. While 4.5% and 1.95% are of the view that workplace diversity in relation to collaboration brings about Integration Issues, integrating diverse employees into existing teams can be challenging, especially if there is resistance to change or a lack of understanding about the benefits of diversity. Also diversity in language, cultural norms, and communication styles can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, which can hinder effective collaboration.



Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK



Source: Field Survey 2024

Figure 3: Feedback on work performance

50.05% of the respondents noted that working with a diverse group can enhance empathy and cultural understanding. This can lead to more supportive and considerate feedback, promoting personal and professional growth.

40.5% observed that diversity fosters creativity and innovation. Feedback from a diverse team can help employees see new ways to approach problems and improve their performance.

0.65% of the respondents revealed that they don't know if workforce diversity improves feedback on work performance

While 5.35% and 3.45% of the responses revealed that, the impact of workforce diversity is low and very low respectively as it reduces group-thinking. Diverse teams are less likely to fall into groupthink, where feedback might be more about conformity than improvement. Diversity encourages independent thinking and more honest feedback.

Table 4.3: Work improvements based on feedback reports

Options	Frequency	Percent
Valid Very High	1199	59.95
High	651	32.55
Don't know	12	0.6
Low	91	4.55
Very Low	47	2.35
Total	2000	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2024

Table 4.3 reveals that 59.9% of the respondents agreed that workplace diversity brings about work improvement based on feedback reports. This enhances creativity and innovation in an organization, a diverse workplace brings together individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. This diversity can lead to more creative solutions and innovative ideas when addressing feedback and implementing improvements. Different viewpoints can help in



identifying unique approaches and strategies that might not have been considered in a more homogenous environment but diversity create opportunity for feedback and then subsequently improvement.

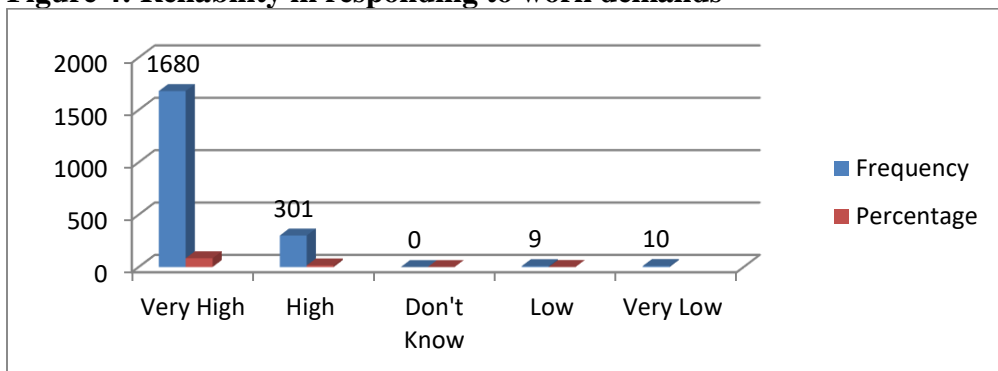
32.55% of the respondents also stressed that workplace diversity create room for comprehensive problem-solving. Diverse teams are better equipped to tackle complex problems because they can draw on a wider range of experiences and knowledge. Consequently, when feedback reports identify problems or areas requiring enhancement, teams with diverse perspectives can examine them from several viewpoints, resulting in more efficient and thorough solutions.

0.6% of the respondents are of the view that they don't know if workplace diversity really affects employee responsiveness in the area of work improvement based on feedback reports. They further stresses that feedback and suggestions are not taken serious most time by the management especially in the public sector as it is not driven by profit and customer satisfaction, they are cases were suggestion/feedback box are placed at strategic points but the suggestions/feedback from both workers and the general public are not taken serious

4.55% and 2.35% of the respondents noted with dismay that workplace diversity have low effect on employee responsiveness in terms of work improvement based on feedback report due to bias as the assessor may tend to give unfavorable report about the performance of a particular employee due to the fact that they are not from same zone or cultural grouping, as such the morale of the employee will be low due to the fact he or she is not appreciated.

In conclusion, workplace diversity can significantly enhance the process of making work improvements based on feedback reports. By fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, organizations can leverage a wide range of perspectives, skills, and experiences to drive continuous improvement and achieve better outcomes.

**Figure 4: Reliability in responding to work demands**



Source: Field Survey 2024

84% of the respondents noted that diverse workforce bring varied perspectives and experiences, leading to more creative solutions and improved problem-solving abilities. This can enhance reliability as teams are better equipped to handle unexpected challenges. 15.05% of the answers show that a diverse workforce combines different skill sets, making the team more adaptable and resilient. Employees can rely on each other's strengths, leading to more consistent and reliable performance.

0.45% and 0.5% despite the benefits, diversity can also present challenges. Differences in communication styles and cultural misunderstandings can lead to conflicts or misalignment in expectations. Proper training and management are essential to harness the positive aspects of diversity while mitigating potential downsides.

**Table 4.4: Understanding the concerns of colleagues and offering support to them in the workplace**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Valid		
Very High	1050	52.5
High	812	40.6
Don't know	20	1
Low	60	3
Very Low	58	2.9
Total	2000	100.0

**Source: Field Survey 2024**

Table 4.4 shows that 52.5% of the respondents are of the view that diverse workplaces expose employees to a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, fostering greater empathy and understanding of colleagues' unique challenges, thereby promoting active listening, where colleagues pay more attention to each other's perspectives, leading to better support.

40.6% are of the opinion that, employees become more culturally competent, understanding and respecting cultural differences, which helps in recognizing and addressing concerns appropriately. 3% and 2.9% of the respondents noted that diversity brings about a tailored support programs. Diverse workplaces are more likely to implement inclusive policies and programs that address the specific needs of different employee groups.

**Table 4.5: Use of initiative in addressing work-related issues**

Options		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very High	1055	52.75
	High	775	38.75
	Don't know	26	1.3
	Low	90	4.5
	Very Low	54	2.7
	Total	2000	100.0

**Source: Field survey 2024**

52.75% of the respondents are of the view that workplace diversity encourages use of initiatives in addressing work-related issues as different employees with different strategies will offer suggestions and opinions that will help in tackling the issues at hand. A diverse workplace brings together individuals with varied backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. This can lead to more innovative solutions as employees draw on a wider range of ideas and approaches.

While 38.75% observed also that organization that is diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and other factors are often better at problem-solving. The varied experiences and skills within such teams enable them to tackle complex issues more effectively.

Lastly, 4.5% and 2.7% noted that workplace diversity have low and very low effect on employee use of initiative in addressing work-related issues due to the challenges of inclusion. Simply having a diverse workforce is not enough. It is crucial that all employees feel included and valued. Without a culture of inclusion, diverse teams may not fully leverage their potential, and some individuals might feel hesitant to take the initiative.

## CONCLUSION

Workforce diversity has a substantial impact on employee responsiveness. Workforce diversity greatly improves employee responsiveness by promoting a more imaginative, flexible, and thorough approach to problem-solving and decision-making. Nevertheless, in order to fully achieve these advantages, it is necessary to efficiently handle any obstacles to communication and disagreements. By implementing effective techniques, organizations can utilize diversity to enhance their overall adaptability and effectiveness.

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Global Journal of Human Resource Management

Vol.12, No.6, pp.1-13, 2024

Print ISSN: 2053-5686(Print),

Online ISSN: 2053-5694(Online)

Website: <https://www.eajournals.org/>

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

Lanka. Proceedings of the 7th CIPM International Research Symposium – Sri Lanka.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372647208>