



Managing Workforce Diversity: An Antidote to Ethnocentrism in Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract

This is a conceptual paper that reviews ethnocentric practices among employees and the need for the implementation of workforce diversity management in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The main objective of the paper is to re-emphasize how effective workplace diversity management can be an antidote to ethnocentric practices in Higher Educational Institutions. The paper highlights the introduction, capturing the various perspectives held by scholars over the years on workplace ethnocentrism and workplace diversity management. The Social Dominance Theory (SDT) has been discussed as the theoretical framework that underpinned the paper. The method used was purely scholarly publications. From the discourses, it is apparent that the prevalence of ethnocentric behaviours in universities weakens human relations, leads to conflict, prejudice, breeds bias, racism, hate, and increases the risk of holding flawed assumptions about people's ethnicity and cultures. The paper recommends that universities implement and manage workforce diversity initiatives that are more tolerant of different behavioural styles and wider views among staff members. University managers and policymakers need to prioritise ethnic and cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness as core university values.

Keywords: Ethnocentrism, Diversity, Management, Workforce, Institutions.

Introduction

The origin of the concept of ethnocentrism is attributed to Sumner (1906), who observed the tendency for employees to differentiate between in-group and out-group members. However, its first printed use was in a paper by McGee (1900). The concept of ethnocentrism can be explained as a concept where the word *ethno* comes from Greek and refers to people, nations, institutions, or cultural groupings, while *centric* comes from Latin and refers to the center (Sociology Guide, 2011).

Ethnocentrism is the belief held by a particular ethnic group in an organisation that their ways of carrying out work assignments, and responsibilities, and the level of commitments they exert as a specific group of employees within a given educational institution are unique, standard, and better than other ethnic groups ways of and manner of executing work responsibilities (Guy-Evans & Mcleod, 2023; Bizumic, 2012). In other words, ethnocentrists believe their ways of life in organisations are central and superior while

others' lives and activities are somehow inferior (Guy-Evans & Mcleod, 2023; Bizumic, 2012).

This way of thinking and belief held by various ethnic groups in our Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) breeds nepotism and favouritism in the employment processes. For example, there are cases where certain managers in specific faculties, departments, units, and sectional areas recommend employing job seekers from the same ethnic groups and also prefer working well with employees from the same ethnicity and cultural background. One of the reasons for this kind of unfair employment and labour practices is the influence of ethnocentrism. This is because, in ethnocentrism, members of a particular ethnic group (in-group) are of the view that they are the centre of all happenings in the organisation, and all other ethnic groups of employees (out-groups) found in educational institutions are scaled and rated about it (Sumner, 1906; Weinstein, 2013).

Ethnocentrism in organizations breeds grounds for ethnic superiority and preference; for example, Taylor (2009) states that ethnocentrism in HEIs is centered on the view that one's ethnic group's ways of life seem normal, while others seem



peculiar. Again, Monaghan and Bizumic (2023) opined that in an educational institution, what is normal for a particular ethnocentric group of employees is preferable, but what is unfamiliar to such a group is less preferred.

It is important to highlight that ethnocentric behaviours in organisations are centred on interest, favouritism, and making employment opportunities available to only ingroup members. According to Bizumic (2012) and Sumner (1911), some notable ethnocentric behaviours among employees include the formation of intergroups to express their group cohesion, devotion, comradeship, preferences, superiority, purity, and exploitativeness. The existence of ethnocentrism in higher educational institutions can be observed in the expression of ingroup superiority and their tendency to defend their interests against the outgroup (Sumner, 1911; Sociology Guide, 2011; Taylor, 2009). Also, the causes of ethnocentrism in educational institutions are threat and insecurity, self-aggrandizement, intragroup similarity and outgroup differences, proneness to simplification and ignorance, social factors or influences outside the individual, and evolutionary factors (Bizumic, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Ethnocentric behaviours are still predominant in our Higher Educational Institutions, where individuals and groups willingly and unwillingly judge colleagues and their work practices through the lens of their own ethnicity and social backgrounds. These beliefs held by individual ethnic groups often manifest in biased labour employment practices. This is where the members of the major ethnic group (ingroup), either within the university's school, faculty, unit, or department, willingly and unwillingly exclude and marginalize the minority ethnic group members (outgroup) from recruitment and promotional opportunities, decision-making processes, communication, and the sharing of important information.

These ethnocentric behaviours sometimes undermine teamwork in universities, affect trust, negatively impact collaboration, and give rise to conflict, low morale, and a lack of diverse skills and perspectives from faculty or university wide workforce. In a globalised and multicultural university-wide system, the prevalence of ethnocentrism poses a serious challenge to equality, inclusiveness, and effectiveness in the university system, making it a serious organisational problem that requires managerial and policy interventions

Theoretical Framework

The theory that underpins this paper is the Social Dominance Theory (SDT) propounded by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in 1999. The theory is a social, institutional, and intergroup relation focusing on how employees form a hierarchy with a supporting belief structure to ensure their dominance in organisations (Islam, 2014; Henry, 2017). The Social Dominance theory is rooted in a theory of intergroup relations, which focuses on group maintenance and stability of its social status (Henry, 2017). Social Dominance theory proposes individual employee difference variables and their social dominance orientation to explain why employees use

differences that exist among themselves to endorse group differences (Islam, 2014; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

This is why Islam (2014) explains that in-group formations in organisations contain status hierarchies where in-group employees have privileges over out-group employees. Employees with high social orientation are inclined to support group-based ideologies characterised by the promotion of group inequalities, attitudes, and values (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Given that ethnocentrism involves the belief held by a particular group of employees that their ethnic group's ways of life seem normal, while others seem peculiar and given that this same group of employees assign more value to their group (ingroup) than other groups (out-groups), this is theoretically linked with Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) in that, human develop and transform, as such, some employees (in-group) at workplaces develop a basic human tendency to form group-based social hierarchies that exclude other employees (out-group) who are different from the ingroup (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), also Duckitt (2001) explained that in the Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) theory, the ingroup claims to be more importance than other groups (outgroups) especially if the ingroup is high in status and power.

The Dangers of Ethnocentric Practices in Organisations

The practice of ethnocentrism in HEIs could lead to hostilities and conflict among employees (Bizumic, 2012). Ethnocentrism gives more employment opportunities to certain groups over others (Christie, 1997; Christie, Tint, Wagner, & Winter, 2008). Ethnocentrism, which is a natural cause reinforced by top management, probably hinders an effective and conducive environment for employees' productivity (Bizumic, 2012).

Extreme ethnocentrism leads to negativity and prejudice (David, Max, et al. 2006), and the approval of the exploitation of outgroup employees for the ingroup employees' need (Bizumic et al., 2009). According to Ashley (2007), and Taylor (2009), ethnocentric practices lead to ingroup thinking that they are self-righteous and better than out-group members and breed bias, racism, hate, and conflict. This is why Tusabe (2008) explains that ethnocentrism can act as a basis for conflict and hostilities, which can act as a barrier to organizational cohesion.

Ethnocentrism discourages change in organisations (Taylor, 2009), changes such as the appointment of outgroup members to top management positions, it breeds ground for attitudes of suspicion, disdain, and hostility (May, 1998), and it also hinders cooperation among employees with diverse cultures (Sociology Guide, 2011). Ethnocentrism leads to dislike and contempt for other employees; it leads to the belief that the representativeness of other cultures or ethnicities in organisations is inferior and not preferred (Tusabe, 2008).

Managing Ethnocentrism in HEIs through Workforce Diversity Initiatives

Though, it is difficult for employees not to be ethnocentric in educational institutions even when they try their best to be open-minded (Taylor, 2009), but a critical look at the dangers, repercussions, and the destructive nature of ethnocentrism in our HEIs show a worrying phenomenon, therefore, there is a need for a high level of awareness creation among staff of these dangers, there is the need for the institutionalisation, and implementation of workforce diversity management initiatives that recognise, accept and treat all ethnic groups equally in all levels of management. The management of workforce diversity as an Antidote to ethnocentrism in Higher Educational Institutions is discussed below:

Workforce Diversity Management in Higher Educational Institutions

A variety of ethnicities, experiences, races, languages, religions, genders, and political affiliations are the spices of life in HEIs, unlike the practices of ethnocentrism; these spices, in the form of workforce diversity management and equal treatment of all employees irrespective of ethnicity, need to be captured and utilised by HEIs (Maicibi, 2008). The more globally-oriented economy and the changing labour market have made it more likely that people from varying backgrounds have settled in different geographic localities to work with others from even more different backgrounds than ever before (Wolhuter et al., 2007). Thus, over time, diversity has become typical of all societies, and so needs to be managed to prevent the existence of ethnocentric practices (Niemann, 2006; Wolhuter et al., 2007).

The term “diversity” comes from the Latin term *diversus*, meaning more than one of a different kind or variety (Wolhuter et al., 2007). Diversity relates to the fact that employees are unique individuals, differentiated by ethnicity, race, language, religion, gender, and political affiliation, which have a significant bearing on their experiences (Wolhuter et al., 2007; Maicibi, 2008). Diverse organisations, therefore, are characterised by employees of different sexes, races, ages, cultures, marital status, nationality, sexual orientation, geographic locations, disabilities, learning preferences, ethnic backgrounds, educational qualification and political affiliations who are expected to be treated equally irrespective of their ethnicities or differences (Wolhuter et al., 2007; Maicibi, 2008; Niemann, 2006).

The Benefits of a Diverse Workforce

The benefits derived from using workforce diversity management initiatives as antidotes to ethnocentrism practices in HEIs are that with workforce diversity, HEIs create work environments in which employees of different backgrounds, culture and orientations are accepted by all employees, instead of one ethnic group (ingroup) being the centre of all activities (Niemann, 2006). HEIs that embrace workforce diversity can contribute to the strategic and competitive advantage of such organisations (Grobler & Shurette, 2006). Nurturing a

diverse workforce brings richness to an organisation that needs to be treasured and built upon (Wolhuter et al., 2007)

With a diverse workforce, an organisation creates an environment that allows all employees, irrespective of any seeming differences, to reach their full potential in pursuit of the organisational goals (Niemann, 2006; Maicibi, 2008). It excludes no one (unlike in ethnocentrism), it recognises, honours, and embraces all cultural and ethnic differences (Maicibi, 2008).

A well-structured and managed diverse workforce, according to Maicibi (2008), encourages equal opportunity to all employees, embraces inclusiveness of races, ethnic groups, nationalities, and sexes, searches for talented employees, and generates a pool of mixed, old, and fresh experiences, skills, and knowledgeable employees. Grobler and Shurette (2006) confirmed these by stating that a well-managed diverse workforce taps into a range of skills that the HEIs never had before, a well-managed diverse workforce attracts and retains the best talent among the workforce, and promotes effective service delivery as a result of job satisfaction, which is derived from equal treatment for all employees and the absence of ethnocentrism.

The Management and Skills Training Programmes for Workforce Diversity

Managing diversity workshops in HEIs helps employees move away from ethnocentrism and stereotyping to the development of respect for individuals, not as members of a specific cultural group but rather as individual employees who have unique relationships with the many and complex social variables that have impacted their development in the organisation (Human, 1996; Maicibi, 2008).

To manage ethnocentrism in HEIs, there is a need to initiate the implementation of a diverse workforce, where there is an increase in employees' awareness of and sensitivity to the differences of race, culture, gender, and social class (Maicibi, 2008). All aspects of cultural diversity in the HEIs should be recognised without reinforcing traditional biases and stereotypes (Niemann, 2006). Employees should be encouraged to evaluate themselves and to confront ethnic, cultural, and gender stereotypes, prejudices, and inequalities that they might hold (Niemann, 2006; Maicibi, 2008).

According to Maicibi (2008), language training is one of the ways of promoting respect for other cultures found in organisations; it is also a way of promoting multiculturalism in organisations. This is why Maicibi (2008) states that, to eliminate prejudice and ethnocentrism in HEIs, employees should self-monitor themselves by being empathetic and aware of how their language and other behaviours affect other employees, and be willing to modify these behaviours towards other employees.

It is also important to highlight here that education and training play an important part in equipping employees to recognise, accept, and appreciate differences in attitude, lifestyle, languages, culture, or gender (Wolhuter et al., 2007). With this, Niemann (2006) claimed that an important success

factor for diversity initiatives in fighting ethnocentrism is the commitment of top management in attending to workforce diversity trainings and for increasing diversity in their organisation, this by setting up a diversity steering group, which is made up of diverse employees representing groups identified by the diversity audit.

To manage the existence of ethnocentrism, more emphasis should be placed on implementing workforce diversity. Workshops should be arranged to allow employees to participate in group discussions with representatives from diverse groups (Niemann, 2006; Wolhuter et al., 2007). These employees should be able to participate in activities that are designed to change attitudes; for instance, using exercises in which they learn to realise what it is like to feel different, how marginalisation affects the overall competencies and capabilities, and how to handle questions about rank, power, privilege and prejudice (Niemann, 2006; Wolhuter et al., 2007; Human, 1996).

Implications

The prevalence of ethnocentrism in universities, as highlighted in this paper, implies that managers and policymakers must prioritise ethnic and cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness as core values of the university. Failure to address ethnocentric behaviours can perpetuate inequality, weaken staff commitment, and organisational effectiveness. Therefore, the university must invest in diversity-oriented leadership, fair labour and human resources practices, and continue intercultural training to mitigate bias, harness diverse talents, and promote harmonious working relations among staff members.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ethnocentric behaviours within the university system may increase the risk of making unethically sound decisions about a particular group of employees, may increase the risk of holding flawed assumptions about other people's ethnicity and cultures, and are likely to give special assistance to one's own ethnic group members or employees (in-group favouritism). Ethnocentrism is a powerful force that weakens human relations in most universities. Therefore, it is important for staff members, whether in-group or out-group members, to be tolerant of differences in customs, practices, and styles of colleagues. Furthermore, universities must implement and manage cultural diversity initiatives that are more tolerant of different behavioural styles and wider views among staff members; this, in the long run, will benefit universities in terms of equal employment and promotional opportunities, better decision-making, effective information and knowledge sharing, a high level of inclusiveness and collaboration, and greater responsiveness to the diverse needs of employees.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the University Governing Council should work together to reaffirm their positions on the existence of multiculturalism in all spheres of university life, and where there is a recognition

of cultural pluralistic society in the university system. The university management must again put more emphasis on the already existing reforms and the establishment of diversity management policies that make the working environment so diverse that all employees experience employment and promotional equality.

The university management should identify ethnocentric behaviours, biases, or stereotypes of employees and develop strategies for changing perceptions. Management should create a cross-cultural and cross gender mentoring programme and provide training for mentors. The Human Resources Directorate should create processes to make staff who are different from the majority group or culture feel welcome and included, and they should incorporate ideas from other ethnicities and cultures to solve organisational problems.

The Human Resources Directorate should encourage all employees through their deans, heads, and coordinators to evaluate themselves and to confront ethnic, cultural, and gender stereotypes, prejudices, and inequalities that they might hold in the university. All deans, directors, heads of departments, coordinators, and sectional leaders should be assisted by the university personnel section in organising workforce diversity trainings for all managers and leaders and by setting up a diversity steering group, which is made up of diverse employees representing groups identified by the diversity audit.

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