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INFLUENCE OF LOCUS OF CONTROL ON CONFORMITY TO AUTHORITY IN A MULTICULTURAL ORGANISATION – A CASE OF IITA NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the influence of locus of control on conformity to authority in a multicultural organisation. A total of 112 respondents drawn from the employees of IITA Nigeria participated in the study. In all, 69 (representing 61.6%) were males, while 43 (38.4%) were females with mean ages of 34 and 31.2 years respectively.

*The survey study adopted the *ex post facto* design. Data collection was done by using questionnaires which contained the locus of control scale and conformance to authority scale (both by Rotters, 1990) with reliability coefficient values of 0.67 and 0.70, respectively.*

The first hypothesis was confirmed ($t = 24.2, df = 110, p < .05$) indicating significant difference on conformance to authority between high and low scorers on internal locus control. However, the second hypothesis was rejected ($t = 1.61, df = 110, p > .05$), indicating no significant difference between females and males on conformance to authority.

The overall findings however showed that most of the indigenous employees in the organisation scored above average in terms of their conformance to authority.

INTRODUCTION

The differences in individual characteristics differentiate employees from one another in organizations. Such differences come into play in organisational behaviours of employees. As it is in every social setting, the work setting is not the least homogeneous in the experiences of individual actions and reactions. Sometimes, they are as diverse as the various factors that distinguish one individual from

another.

While some workers in organisations are females, others are males. Similarly, some are married while others are not. Many of them are young while others are in the older category. But fundamentally more interesting is that some employees display a personality dimension which Rotter (1990) described as either internal or external locus of control. Those characterised by internal locus of control usually feel they have control over situations around them, can influence events, perceive themselves as competent to be able to predict what happens to them. On the other hand, the individuals characterised by external locus of control usually attribute events around them to forces beyond their control and externally located.

All these factors are important in the explanation of human behaviours at work. Any factor that differentiate one individual from another also become a necessary factor in explaining behaviour of the individuals at work. Such behaviours could be in terms of their reactions to organizational leadership, policies, and practices. More importantly, the different dimensions of personal characteristics can come to play in employees' reaction to the rationally based formal right to influence behaviour and implement decisions. This organisational behaviour demands a certain measure of employees conformity to the authority that will enable the implementation of policies and programmes that could promote the realization of the corporate goals and objectives. Following the differences in the factors characterising individuals, such factors become necessary in examining the organisational behaviour of conformance to authority.

As organizations bring together people of diverse cultural background to work in a particular locality, they are faced with the problem of enjoying the cooperation and conformance of the indigenous employees to rules and regulations implemented by the "foreigners" in authority. This is most typical in multicultural

organizations with international definition.

In a multicultural organisation like the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Nigeria, individuals mostly at the top management level are transferred from participating countries to work in Nigeria. Considering the exclusion of the indigenous employees from the top management cadre, it will not be out of place to expect their resistance to the foreign supervisors in management positions. With this expectation what then will be their level of conformance to authority in the organisation? How much of their individual differences come to play in their conformity to authority in the organisation? Which categories of the indigenous employees are likely to show higher level of conformance to authority in the organisation? This study is therefore aimed at investigating the influence of psychosocial factors on employees conformance to authority in IITA Ibadan, Nigeria. In doing this, employees' individual characteristics of gender and locus of control will be assessed. The locus of control theory by Rotter (1990), and conformity theory by Asch (1958) served as the guide for the study. The locus of control theory explains that people's attitudes and behaviour will to some extent, be influenced by their control expectancies. The implication is that there will be difference in attitude to the level of conformance to authority by employees characterised by internal or external locus of control. On the other hand, the conformity theory shed light on how people perceive the potentials for obedience to authority.

It further states that people will conform especially when they compare themselves to those with whom they share certain characteristics in common. The theory further explained that to understand conformity in a particular situation, there is the need to understand the factors that persuade individuals to relinquish their autonomy and willingly become voluntary agents of the system. Employees' locus of control, (internal or external) would go a long way to explain how well the individual employee would comply and

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conform with authority directives within the organization.

Sibyll (1983), reported that employees with internal locus of control will ordinarily have a plain attitude towards the authority compared to those with external locus of control. But considering the relativity of cultural differences, such conclusion should be held with caution. This view is however based on findings in Western culture. Dennis (1974), also reported his findings that people who operate with the principle of internal locus of control are likely to be good conformers to authority than others. From the theories and past related studies, it is obvious that differences exist in attitude and behaviours of employees of different characteristics.

The hypotheses therefore are:

- (i) Employees who score higher on internal locus of control measure will show significantly higher score on conformance to authority scale than the low scorers on internal locus of control.
- (ii) Female employees will show significantly higher score on conformance to authority scale than the males.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the ex post facto design. One hundred and twelve (112) male and female employees drawn from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Ibadan, Nigeria participated in the study. In the sample, 69 (61.6%) were males, while 43 (38.4%) were females.

They both had mean age of 34 and 31.2 years respectively. The longest serving employee had spent 18 years in the organisation, while the shortest duration being 1 year both with a mean of 6.4 years (S.D. = 4.36).

Questionnaires were used for data collection in the study. Each comprised of three sections (A, B, and C). The section 'A' was used to measure socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The

section B contained the Rotter's 1990 locus of control scale. It has 10 items scored in a 5-point liker format, the higher the score the more internally oriented, the individual employee is characterised. The scale yielded a cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.67 in the study. The section 'C' of the questionnaire contained the conformance to authority scale also developed by Rotter. It has 10 items scored on a 5-point likert format. It has a cronbach coefficient alpha of 0.70 in the study.

Administration of questionnaires was restricted to the Nigeria employees of IITA. The foreign staff was deliberately excluded because they mostly occupy the top management positions in the organisation. It is from them that directives flow to the Nigeria employees who are mainly in subordinate positions.

RESULTS

The independent t-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis generated in the study. The results indicate that those who scored higher on internal locus of control measure (24.08) showed significantly higher conformance to authority than those who scored lower (20.96) ($t = 2.42$, $df = 110$, $p < .05$). This therefore confirmed hypothesis one.

It was also found that females in IITA did not score significantly higher than the males on conformance to authority scale ($t = 1.61$, $df = 110$, $p > .05$). The hypothesis was rejected as there was no significant difference between male ($X = 23.1$) and female ($X = 24.0$) respondents.

The findings of the result which confirm hypothesis one supports Rotter's assertion that those who identified more with internal locus of control will tend to be more obedient to authority than others. This outcome is also similar to that of Sibyll (1983) that the internals will ordinarily have a plain attitude towards the authority. This findings also enjoy those of Hammer and Vardi; and Runyon, 1973; Kren,

1992.

The results did not confirm the second hypothesis as there was no significant difference between the females and males ($p > .05$). The finding contradicts that of Sheridan and King (1972). In their earlier study, they concluded that females are more obedient, compliant and better conformers than males in organizations. The outcome may not be unconnected with common characteristics of employees such as educational level, and locus of control, which did not indicate any significant difference between the male and female respondents.

However, the study responses indicated that 92% of all the respondents scored above average on their conformance to authority in IITA. This is an indication that the authority of IITA enjoys indigenous employees conformity to the norms of the organisation. Such level of conformance to authority by the workers may be as a result of the strict protocols and good working environment prevailing in the organisation. This can be seen in the physical condition of IITA. Perhaps, the remuneration which is higher than the government sector in Nigerian may be a good explanation that readily come to mind and also the international staff who occupy higher positions of authority in the organisation conducts the affairs by acting as role models worthy of emulation.

It was therefore concluded that although all the respondents indicated high level of conformance to authority in IITA, their personality variables also have implication for organisational behaviour. In a multi-cultural organisation as IITA, the seeming under representation of indigenous employees is not a hindrance to their conformity to authority. Such obedience and loyalty should be encouraged and appreciated by the top management. This it can do by creating opportunities for progression in the hierarchy for the indigenous staff as well.

Finally, the findings provided an opportunity to understand the level of conformance to the authority in a multi-cultural organisation

in Nigeria by the indigenous employees. The expected resistance typical of indigenous workers in multi-cultural organisations is not obvious in IITA.

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