

GENDER, TEAMWORK AND MANAGEMENT: A GLIMPSE INTO THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

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Abstract

Many organisations and nations today are turning to teams to manage their operations and help them reach their goals and objectives in a competitively charged business environment as is experienced in the present global arena. However, as much as teamwork is fancied in the workplace today, team processing is not without its gender-specific prescriptions and guidelines. In this study, the authors have shown, through the abundance of gender literature reviewed, that organisations and workplaces are not gender-neutral and thus are influenced in their operations, decisions, team processing, division of tasks and labour by embedded gender considerations. Although, the gendered workplace may not be altered anytime soon because of the institutionalisation of gender, however, this paper has attempted a glimpse into the Nigerian situation and highlighted ways by which teamwork can become effective in the workplace.

Keywords: gender, gendered organisations, team, teamwork, management

Introduction

The world of work is changing. There has been a shift away from rural work and also away from heavy industry and manufacturing. New jobs are being created in the service sector and change in information technology has created new types of work and forms of working. Globalisation has also increased competition, pressures to rationalise and the need for flexibility in organisations today (Kauppinen, Kumpulainen, Houtman & Copsey, 2003). However, one important change has been the entry of more women into the labour market. Many reasons have been given for the increased penetration of women in the workplace. These reasons include the need for a two-income family occasioned by economic factors; increase in the educational and professional qualifications of women, making them more qualified for some positions than men; the globalising influence of Western culture with its political ideology of liberalism, its socio-cultural movement and support for the empowerment of women and its pursuit of a gender-neutral system of meritocracy; and the relentless campaigns for the empowerment of women led by civil society groups, government bodies, international organisations, NGOs and influential political and public office holders interested in the widening of the space in the political economy of their various societies, *inter alia* (Olotu, 2008; Musami, 2010). As much as these calls have gained grounds and are beginning to open up the political economy of states to greater women participation, including the modern workplace, issues

of gender equality, overcoming gender bias, changing the gendered workplace and organisations, have continued to generate interest among gender scholars and management practitioners.

In fact, the campaign pursuing the equal rights of women in the public realm and in business accompanied the rise of feminism in the latter half of the 20th century (Baxter, 2000). As a result, gender equality within the workplace quickly became an issue of primary importance on the liberal feminist agenda. According to Baxter, although the majority of these efforts were focused on the attainment of equal opportunity, equal pay for work of equal value, and the equal treatment of *women* in the conventionally male domain of paid employment, the struggle for gender equality has grown significantly in the past two decades, and its advocates have grown in both scope and diversity. While the feminist movement was central in drawing attention to and challenging the dichotomy between home and work, new pieces of literature surrounding fatherhood, men and masculinity and work-life balance have continued this line of questioning. Subsequently, the issue of gender within the workplace has become prominent on multiple agendas.

Meanwhile, as the gender debate is raging on, so also have the discussions on the importance of groups and teams become a major focus in the business world. Organizations have well realised that the evolution from individual to team management approach is a priority in current time. The reality is that much of

organization's work is accomplished directly or indirectly through teams. Individual decision making has taken a backstage and paved the way for a team management approach to problem-solving and decision-making. This strategy, if well monitored and invested in, not only benefits the organization but also the individual employee, hence it has been rapidly adopted by businesses. This is because teams have now become the means to grow effectiveness and efficiency in many organisations today and to create and sustain social interactions and relations between and among workers.

But as Acker (1990) argues, sociological research has found that organizations are gendered in many ways (Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991; Acker, 1990; Hall, 1993a, 1993b; Pierce, 1995; Halford, Savage & Witz, 1997). This paper seeks to look at the relationship that gender shares with and within teamwork and management, and examine how management moderates the process of gender relations in the workplace. This study is important because it puts a spotlight on how gender influences team processes and how team processes shape gender relations in a team. It is expected that findings here will be useful to academics, researchers and industry practitioners and further extend the frontiers of research into this subject.

Conceptual clarification

The definitions of gender and gender identity vary on a doctrinal basis. In popularized and scientifically debased usage, sex is what you are biologically (male and female); gender is what you become socially; gender identity is your own sense or conviction of maleness or femaleness; and gender role is the cultural stereotype of what is masculine and feminine.

Historians (Acker, 1992; Musami, 2010) who study gender see it as a cultural construct, i.e. something that human beings create and that changes over time. The differences between men and women, they argue, are rooted in society, not in nature, and as such can be historicized. Moreover, gender scholars point out, if women's lives have been shaped profoundly by gender prescriptions, then so, too, have men's lives. Cultural ideals and practices of masculinity and femininity have been created together, often in opposition to one another; therefore, both men and women have gender histories that must be analyzed.

This view is shared by Galdas, Johnson, Percy & Ratner (2010), who argue that categorizing males and females into social roles creates binaries, in which individuals feel they have to be at one end of a linear spectrum and must identify themselves as man or woman. They also argue that globally, communities interpret biological differences between men and women to create a set of social expectations that define the behaviours that are "appropriate" for men and women and determine women's and men's different access to rights, resources, status, job definitions and roles, power in society and even health behaviours. Byanyima (2005) adds that although the specific nature and degree of the biological differences between men and women vary from one society to the next, they typically favour men, creating an imbalance in power and gender inequalities in all countries.

According to Hessie-Biber & Carger (2000:91), "Gender is determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. Each society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender." Supporting this view, Borgatta & Montgomery (2000) contend that "Gender is the division of people into two categories, "men" and "women". Through interaction with caretakers, socialization in childhood, peer pressure in adolescence, and gendered work and family roles, women and men are socially constructed to be different in behaviour, attitudes, and emotions. (Thus) the gendered social order is based on and maintains these differences."

The World Health Organisation, in defining the differences that exist between gender and sex, states that "Gender is used to describe those characteristics of women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles" (WHO, 2002:4). Therefore, as the operators of the International Fund for Agricultural found out, gender relations refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society (IFAD, 2000). From these definitions therefore, it

can be inferred that gender is the social and cultural prescriptions given to males and females with specific attributes and behaviours expected of males and females and which define their roles and status in society, the workplace, family, access to resources, power relations and social interaction.

Teams and teamwork

Before teamwork is defined, it is important to clarify what the word team stands for. Team, according to Delarue (2003), is a group of employees who have at least some collective tasks and where the team members are authorised to regulate mutually the execution of these collective tasks. Strus (2002) says it is a mistake to use the terms *group* and *team* interchangeably. For him, a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable." This small number of people means between 2 and 25 team members. Effective teams typically have fewer than 10 members. A survey of 400 workplace team members in the United States and Canada found that the average North American team consists of 10 members and that eight is the most common size" (In Strus, 2002). Thus, a group becomes a team when the following criteria are met:

1. *Leadership* becomes a shared activity.
2. *Accountability* shifts from strictly individual to both individual and collective.
3. The group develops its own *purpose* or mission.
4. *Problem solving* becomes a way of life, not a part-time activity.
5. *Effectiveness* is measured by the group's collective outcomes and products.

Teamwork, therefore, refers to the actions of individuals, who have been brought together with their diverse but complementary skills to achieve a common purpose or goal. In essence, each person on the team subordinates his/her needs to work towards the larger group objective. Hence, teamwork is the interactions among the members and the work they complete.

Management defined

According to Classical theorists, management aims at developing processes and principles that foster efficiency in organisational life. For Behavioural

theorists, management is understanding workers' attitudes, behaviour, motivation needs and applying conceptual and analytical tools to these needs with a view to predicting and influencing workers' behaviour (Daft, 2005). For the Quantitative theorists, management should be concerned on how to use mathematical and statistical approaches to solve management problems, allocate scarce resources including time and by being concerned with improving productivity and quality of goods and services through capacity planning, facilities location, facilities layout, materials requirement planning, scheduling, purchasing and inventory control, quality control, computer integrated manufacturing, just-in-time inventory systems, and flexible manufacturing systems (O'Connor, 1999).

The Systems School theorists on management are focused on properly understanding organization as an open system that transforms inputs into outputs. The systems school focuses on the organization as a whole, its interaction with the environment, and its need to achieve equilibrium (Robbins & Coulter, 1999).

For the Contingency School theorists, management principles and processes are dictated by the unique characteristics of each situation. In this sense, as Daft (2005) observes, there is no one best way to manage and that it depends on various situational factors, such as the external environment, technology, organizational characteristics, characteristics of the manager, and characteristics of the subordinates. Other contemporary management thoughts have developed over time to address management needs and problems. Senge (1990) developed the learning organisation as a result of his study on the unprecedented environmental and technological change affecting the contemporary organisation today. For him, the learning organization is one in which all employees are involved in identifying and solving problems, which allows the organization to continually increase its ability to grow, learn, and achieve its purpose.

From the foregoing definitions, we can define management as a dynamic system with processes and principles led by a group of people who seek to understand and influence employees' behaviour and attitude to achieve organisational goals and objectives through different problem-solving approaches, within a learning environment of job satisfaction for employees who are also involved in

the growth, learning and survivability of the organisation in a constantly changing environment.

Schein (1980) observes that teamwork serves two functions: organisational functions and individual functions. This is illustrated by the table below:

Organisational and individual functions of a team

| Organisational Functions | Individual Functions |
|--|--|
| Accomplish complex, interdependent tasks that are beyond the capabilities of individuals | Satisfy the individual's need for affiliation. |
| Generate new or creative ideas and solutions. | Develop, enhance, and confirm the individual's self-esteem and sense of identity. |
| Coordinate interdepartmental efforts. | Give individuals an opportunity to test and share their perceptions of social reality. |
| Provide a problem-solving mechanism for complex problems requiring varied information and assessments. | Reduce the individual's anxieties and feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. |
| Implement complex decisions. | Provide a problem-solving mechanism for personal and interpersonal problems. |
| Socialize and train newcomers. | |

Types of teams

According to Strus (2002), there are three main types of teams. These are:

First, Self-Managed Teams. As Strus (2002) stated, an estimated half of the employees at *Fortune 500* companies are working on teams and a growing share of those teams are self-managing. Typically, managers are present to serve as trainers and facilitators. Self-managed teams come in every conceivable format today, some more autonomous than others. Self-managed teams are defined as groups of workers who are given administrative responsibility for their task domains. Administrative responsibility here involves delegated activities such as planning, scheduling, monitoring, and staffing. These are activities normally performed by managers. In short, employees in these unique work groups act as their own supervisors.

Second, Cross-functional Teams. A common feature of self-managed teams, particularly among those above the shop-floor or clerical level, is that they are cross-functional teams. Cross-functional teams are

therefore made of specialists from different areas and with different competencies (Industry Report, 1996).

Third, Virtual Teams. In today's "wired workplaces," it is possible to be a member of a virtual team while working alone. Virtual teams are a product of modern times arising from evolving information technologies such as the Internet, E-mail, videoconferencing, groupware, webinar, and fax machines.

The Team development process

Groups and teams in the workplace go through a maturation process, such as one would find in any life-cycle situation (e.g., humans, organizations, products).

Stage 1: Forming During this "ice-breaking" stage, group members tend to be uncertain and anxious about such things as their roles, who is in charge, and the group's goals. Mutual trust is low, and there is a good deal of holding back to see who takes charge and how.

Stage 2: Storming This is a time of testing. Individuals test the leader's policies and assumptions as they try to determine how they fit into the power structure. Subgroups take shape, and subtle forms of rebellion, such as procrastination, occur. Many groups stall in stage 2 because power politics erupts into open rebellion.

Stage 3: Norming Groups that make it through stage 2 generally do so because a respected member, other than the leader, challenges the group to resolve its power struggles so something can be accomplished. Questions about authority and power are resolved through unemotional, matter-of-fact group discussion. A feeling of team spirit is experienced because members believe they have found their proper roles.

Stage 4: Performing Activity during this vital stage is focused on solving task problems. As members of a mature group, contributors get their work done without hampering others. There is a climate of open communication, strong cooperation, and lots of helping behaviour. Conflicts and job boundary disputes are handled constructively and efficiently. Cohesiveness and personal commitment to group goals help the group achieve more than could any one individual acting alone.

Stage 5: Adjourning The work is done; it is time to move on to other things. Having worked so hard to get along and get something done, many members feel a compelling sense of loss. The return to independence can be eased by rituals celebrating "the end" and "new beginnings." Parties, award ceremonies, graduations, or mock funerals can provide the needed punctuation at the end of a significant group project. Leaders need to emphasize valuable lessons learned in group dynamics to prepare everyone for future group and team efforts.

Teamwork and the gender debate

The movement toward a team-based organizational structure has rekindled an old research interest in the social relations of teams. This is actually the focus of this research paper, to look at the role of gender in team formation and the impact of team processes on gender relations within teams.

A study by Holmes & Stubbe (2003), revealed a stereotypical feminine and masculine classification of behavioural patterns as the basis for a gendered workplace. The findings are illustrated below:

| Feminine | Masculine |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Indirect | Direct |
| Conciliatory | Confrontational |
| Facilitative | Competitive |
| Collaborative | Autonomous |
| Minor contribution (in public) | Dominates (public) talking time |
| Supportive feedback | Aggressive interruptions |
| Person/process feedback | Task/outcome-oriented |
| Affectively oriented | Referentially oriented |

From Holmes and Stubbe's findings, managers tend to do their team selection based on the perception of the genders (men and women). For instance, women are seen to be conciliatory, facilitative and affectively

oriented or emotional and hence are assigned roles that managers think suit such characteristics. Hence, certain jobs are profiled against these characteristics

and it is assumed that such roles can only be played by women, while the others are played by men. .

This status quo had been appreciated by Andersen (1993:31) when he argued that gender was a social structure that women and men are in different, and unequal, positions in society and the workplace based on expectations, division of labour, and access to power and resources, thereby shaping the life experiences of men and women. As Acker (1992) put it, if we understand gender as a “contextually situated process” (Hall, 1993b: 454) and as an interactional activity of displaying socially-scripted, gender-appropriate behaviour (West & Zimmerman, 1987), then we can assume that mixed-sex teams provide a context for various ways of doing (relational) gender.

As Acker (1992) further argues, in addition to the manifest “gender displays” in the workplace, many gendering processes are hidden or transparent in that they appear perfectly neutral to the members of an organization. In her words:

Gendered processes and practices may be open and overt, as when managers choose only men or only women for certain positions or when sexual jokes denigrating women are part of the work culture. On the other hand, gender may be deeply hidden in organizational processes and decisions that appear to have nothing to do with gender.

The “gendering of organizations” occurs through gendering processes that produce and reproduce a “gender sub-structure” of an organization. These processes include but are not limited to: the production of *gendered divisions*, the creation of *symbols*, images, and metaphors that justify (or oppose) organizational gender divisions; the *interactions* between men and women, the internal *mental work of individuals* as they consciously construct their understandings of the organization’s gendered structure of work and opportunity and the demands for gender-appropriate behaviours and attitudes,” and based on their understanding, create and negotiate their “correct gendered persona” in order to survive in the organization (Acker,1992a: 252-254).

The main idea behind naming these processes is that they identify empirically-derived, specific

organizational practices and locations that produce and reproduce gendered social relations. In plain words, then, teamwork processes, team organisation and team management/leadership are dictated by gender divisions and interpretations in the workplace and are expressed by gender relations between men and women on individual teams. This may be in varying degrees, but it is true as Byanyima (2005) agrees, that the gender power relations in the workplace most times, if not all the time, are designed to favour men.

Reasons for the gendering of teamwork in Nigeria

Teamwork processes in Nigeria are not immune from the gendered process of division of labour, gendered division of tasks and gendered value of tasks performed by team members. The reasons for the gendering of teamwork in Nigeria are as follows:

Long-standing beliefs about gender inequality

There are long-standing beliefs working against achieving effective teamwork in the workplace in Nigeria. These beliefs reinforce the view that men and women are unequal and as a result cannot have equal access to rewards, resources, statuses, roles, leadership positions and value in the workplace. This is even when women seemed more qualified than men. This is why in some cases, we hear them say “boardroom politics.” The belief is that women cannot withstand the pressure of office politics and therefore are to be given tasks that fit their “gender.”

Cultural practices There are still strong cultural practices that state that women should be seen but not heard. This further reinforces the inferior position given to women in the workplace.

The gendered workplace which says it's a man's world. In this paper, the authors have tried to argue that the workplace is not gender neutral as we have been made to think. Rather, what we see, even in Nigeria, is a cleverly woven gendered process that determines who gets what, when and how because of gender considerations.

Wrong management style When the managerial style in place is Theory X or does not support a transformative or participatory leadership style, what ensues is a traditional process that promotes and sustains gender-specific behaviours and attributes which all members of teams must subscribe to.

Lack of commitment to effective team building processes Many Nigerian organisations do not understand gender implications in putting together teams in the workplace (Musami, 2010). And without a genuine commitment to effective team building processes, this defeats any effort to promote equality of team members.

Gender identity As long as gender identity governs and dictates the appropriate behaviour expected of men and women in the workplace, teamwork in Nigeria will continue to be influenced by gender considerations.

Gender relations Teamwork has been seen in this paper to be moderated by gender relations, which refer to the way men and women behave as socially and culturally defined. Women are thought to be relational and affective than men, hence are put in HR jobs, marketing jobs, secretarial jobs, personal assistant jobs, customer relationship management jobs and so on, so that they can use their lowly valued skills and knowledge in relating with internal and external customers (Acker, 1992).

Gender hierarchy of skills and knowledge As a direct fallout of the above, skills and knowledge of workers are influenced by gender processes and considerations. Value is also attached to the kind of jobs/tasks performed by the gender. While low value is attached to relational jobs, high value and premium is placed on jobs that are thought to require logic, mathematical and engineering knowledge and so on.

Gender division of labour In Nigeria, just as elsewhere, gender division of labour guides the apportionment of tasks to the genders. There are more women marketers, cashiers, secretaries, designers, customer service officers, personal assistants than men, while there are more men who are politicians, engineers, pilots, and white collar workers than women (Musami, 2010).

Building effective teams within gendered workplaces and organisations in Nigeria

Effective teamwork can still be realised in Nigeria when the following are adhered to:

Clear purpose The vision, mission, goal, or task of every team has to be defined and accepted by everyone, whether male or female. Then, an action plan needs to be built in pursuit of this purpose.

Addressing of negative long-standing gendered beliefs Efforts must be made and taken by management through reorientation of workers to correct any form of gendered beliefs that might affect effective teamwork in the organisations.

Participation An inclusive team where every member is valued and respected irrespective of gender will tend to be more effective than a team where this is lacking.

Development of gender-free organisational and managerial culture When the dominant culture and sub-cultures in organisations favour merit, value-based management systems, and cooperative workplace where the views and contributions of every employee counts, in spite of their gender, such organisations will tend to have effective teamwork in place.

Consensus decisions Decisions made must be by consensus and not by imposition or by gender considerations as long as such decisions are objective and helpful in furtherance of the organisational goals.

Open communication Effective team members should feel free to express their feelings on the tasks as well as on the group's operation. There should not be hidden agendas as everyone should be carried along.

Gender-free roles and work assignments Roles should be assigned not based on gendered prescriptions and attributes, but on skills, competencies, qualifications and experience. Each member must have clear expectations about the roles given so that when action is taken, clear assignments are made, accepted, and carried out. Work is also to be fairly distributed among team members.

Shared leadership While the team has a formal leader, leadership functions should shift from time to time depending on the circumstances, the needs of the group, and the skills of the members. The formal leader must model the appropriate behaviour and help establish positive norms.

Style diversity The team should have a broad spectrum of team-player types including members who emphasize attention to task, goal setting, focus on process, and questions about how the team is functioning. There should be integration of skills and functionalities not based on gender bias.

Self-assessment Periodically, the team should stop to examine how well it is functioning and what may be interfering with its effectiveness and address same in the interest of the comfort and satisfaction of all team members and in the interest of the shared values.

Conclusion

Team scholars and practitioners seldom take gender into account in their writings and thus, by overlooking the gendered constitution of contemporary organizations, they present organizational structures and processes as gender-neutral (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993a; Acker, 2000). While not everyone is silent on the issue of gender, those writers who do mention it (Yeatts & Hyten, 1998) often conclude that gender is inconsequential for teamwork. This conclusion is, however, embedded in the assumption that gender refers simply to a team's demographic composition, that is, the sex categories of 'men' and 'women'

However, the analysis of gender in teams solely as a biological sex category of individual team members hides the existence of gendered processes and reinforces the view of organizations and teams as gender-neutral. As a consequence, gendered processes that critically impact teamwork remain unexamined. Instead, this paper has examined the role gender plays in shaping teamwork, the reasons for the continued gendered workplaces and organizations in Nigeria and what can be done to achieve effective teamwork within the present gendered organisational context.

The authors contend that unless division of labour, tasks, resources, statuses, roles, and positions are freed from gender influences and manipulations, effective teamwork would not be attained, thus denying organisations the benefits derivable from having an engaged workforce and the many benefits that teamwork provides in the modern workplace.

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