



## Impact of Religious Diversity on Team Creativity and Innovation among Public University Employees in Ogun State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*The impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria, is a subject of considerable interest in contemporary diverse workplaces. This paper examined the impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted. A sample of 376 academic and non-academic staff was selected through stratified random sampling technique. Instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Frequency counts, percentage and simple linear regression analysis were used for data analysis. Results revealed significant impact of religious diversity on team creativity ( $\beta = .228, t = 12.816, p < .0005$ ) and significant impact of religious diversity on team innovation ( $\beta = .256, t = 14.473, p < .0005$ ). It was subsequently recommended that institutions should prioritize promoting religious diversity and inclusion in the workplace and encourage collaborative work among employees from different religious backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** Religious diversity, team creativity, innovation, employees.

### Introduction

The impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria, is a subject of considerable interest in contemporary diverse workplaces. Team creativity and innovation are essential for organizational growth and success, while religious diversity is a vital aspect of the workforce composition. In recent years, a growing concern has emerged regarding the decline in team creativity and innovation globally. According to a report by the World Economic Forum (2020), there has been a significant drop in creativity and innovation among employees worldwide.

Creativity is the capacity to conceive innovative and valuable ideas, products, or solutions, as noted by Amabile (2020). This cognitive ability involves breaking free from conventional thinking patterns, forging connections between seemingly disparate concepts, and devising groundbreaking solutions to intricate problems. As a vital component of individual and team performance, creativity empowers organizations to maintain a competitive edge and adapt to shifting market demands. By fostering creativity, organizations can cultivate a culture that encourages experimentation, calculated risk-taking, and continuous improvement. Moreover, creativity serves as the foundation of innovation, enabling the development of novel products, services, and processes that drive business growth and sustainability.

Innovation involves the practical application of creative ideas, resulting in novel products, services, or processes that generate value for organizations and their stakeholders, as noted by Baregheh, Rowley, and Sambrook (2020). This process entails transforming abstract concepts into tangible outcomes, such as new products, improved manufacturing processes, or innovative business models. Innovation can manifest in various forms, including product innovation, which involves creating new or enhanced products; process innovation, which focuses on improving existing processes or introducing new ones; and business model innovation, which involves reconfiguring the organization's value proposition, revenue streams, or cost structures. By embracing innovation, organizations can differentiate themselves from competitors, drive growth, and improve their overall performance.

Although creativity and innovation are interconnected, they represent distinct concepts. Creativity is primarily concerned with generating novel ideas, whereas innovation focuses on putting those ideas into practice (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2022). To illustrate this distinction, creativity can be thought of as the initial spark that sets the creative process in motion, while innovation is the fuel that sustains and grows that spark into a tangible outcome. Recognizing the differences between creativity and innovation is crucial for organizations seeking to establish a culture that encourages innovation. By acknowledging these differences, organizations can develop targeted strategies to foster creativity and implement innovative ideas, ultimately driving growth and improvement.

Studies have consistently shown that organizations are struggling to foster creativity and innovation in the workplace. For instance, a study by McKinsey & Company (2020) in the United States found that companies are facing challenges in promoting creativity and innovation. Similarly, a report by the

Chartered Management Institute (2022) in the United Kingdom highlighted the need for organizations to prioritize creativity and innovation to remain competitive. In Africa, countries such as South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria have also been affected, with a report by the African Development Bank (2022) emphasizing the need for African countries to prioritize creativity and innovation to drive economic growth. In Nigeria, a study by the Nigerian Institute of Management (2023) found that the lack of creativity and innovation is a major challenge facing organizations in the country.

The decline in team creativity and innovation has also affected their sub-variables, including idea generation, problem-solving, and decision-making. Research has shown that this decline can be attributed to various factors, including a lack of autonomy, feedback, and organizational support (Amabile, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of diversity and inclusion in the workplace has also been identified as a hindrance to creativity and innovation (Anderson et al., 2022). These findings suggest that organizations need to create an environment that fosters creativity and innovation by promoting diversity, inclusion and employee support.

Religious diversity, the primary independent variable in this study, refers to the presence of different religious groups within a workplace (Ely & Thomas, 2001). This concept encompasses various dimensions, including religious composition, religious dispersion and religious diversity climate (Phillips, Northcraft, & Neale, 2022). Religious composition pertains to the numerical representation of different religious groups, while religious dispersion refers to the distribution of these groups across different departments or teams (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 2020). The religious diversity climate, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which an organization values and supports religious diversity (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 2020).

Religious diversity has been found to have both positive and negative effects on team creativity. On the one hand, religious diversity can bring different perspectives and ideas to the workplace, leading to increased creativity (Ely & Thomas, 2001). For instance, Cox et al. (2020) found that teams with higher levels of religious diversity were more likely to generate innovative solutions to complex problems. On the other hand, religious diversity can also lead to conflicts and decreased collaboration, hindering creativity (Phillips et al., 2022).

Similarly, research has also shown that religious diversity can have both positive and negative effects on innovation. On the one hand, religious diversity can bring different knowledge and skills to the workplace, leading to increased innovation (Mor Barak et al., 2020). For instance, a study by Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, and Singh (2022) found that organizations with higher levels of religious diversity were more likely to develop new products and services. On the other hand, religious diversity can also lead to communication barriers and decreased trust, hindering innovation (Cox et al., 2020).

Despite the increasing body of research on the impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation, further investigation is necessary to fully understand this relationship. Notably, there is a scarcity of research exploring this topic in non-Western settings, such as Nigeria (Ogbonna & Harris, 2022). This knowledge gap is significant, as cultural and institutional differences may influence the effects of religious diversity on team outcomes. Additionally, the specific mechanisms by which religious diversity affects team creativity and innovation require further examination (Phillips et al., 2022). This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria, thereby contributing to a better understanding of this complex relationship.

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## Objectives

The general objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. to examine the impact of religious diversity on team creativity among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria; and
2. to investigate the impact of religious diversity on team innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria.

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## Hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant impact of religious diversity on team creativity among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant impact of religious diversity on team innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria.

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## Methods

### *Design and Participants*

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a survey design, to investigate the impact of religious diversity on team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. The population of this study consisted of all public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. This included academic and non-academic staff from various departments and faculties. A sample of 400 public university employees was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. The sample was stratified based on the different universities, faculties, and departments to ensure representation from all levels of the university.

### *Instrumentation*

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Demographic information, religious diversity, team creativity and team innovation. The religious diversity section measured the level of religious diversity in each team, while the team creativity and innovation sections measured the level of creativity and innovation in each team. The demographic information section measures respondents' personal information relating to age, gender, cadre and work experience. Other sections are described below.

*Religious Diversity Section:* This section assesses the extent to which team members from different religious backgrounds interact and collaborate. The scale consists of 15 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample item on the scale is "My team members respect each other's religious beliefs". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this sub-scale was found to be .85, indicating good internal consistency. The sub-scale was adapted from a previous study on religious diversity and teamwork (Ely & Thomas, 2001), which provided evidence for its construct validity.

*Team Creativity Section:* This section evaluates the creative performance of teams, including their ability to generate novel and useful ideas. The scale consists of 7 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample item on this sub-scale is "My team is able to come up with innovative solutions to complex problems". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was .88, indicating good internal consistency. The scale was adapted from a previous study on team creativity (Taggar, 2002), which provided evidence for its construct validity.

*Team Innovation Section:* This section assesses the extent to which teams are able to implement new ideas and bring them to fruition. The scale consists of 6 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample item on it is "My team is able to successfully implement new ideas and projects". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was .86, indicating good internal consistency. The scale was adapted from a previous study on team innovation (West & Anderson, 1996), which provided evidence for its construct validity.

#### Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the selected participants through a combination of online and offline methods. Participants were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study. For those who did not have access to email, the questionnaire was administered in person. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaires distributed, 376 were returned, giving an attrition rate of 6%.

#### Method of Data Analysis

The demographic data of the participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentage. Each of the two null hypotheses formulated was tested by means of simple linear regression analysis at the .05 level of significance.

#### Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with the utmost respect for the participants' rights and dignity. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before administering the questionnaire. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

## Results

#### Demographic Presentation

**Table 1: Descriptives for Participants' Demographic Data**

S/N	Characteristics	Level N = 376	Count	%
1.	Age (years)	Below 30	56	14.9
		30 – 49	205	54.5
		50 & above	115	30.6
2.	Gender	Male	219	58.2
		Female	157	41.8
3.	Cadre	Academic Staff	216	57.4
		Non-Academic Staff	160	42.6
4.	Work Experience (years)	Less than 10	95	25.3
		10 – 19	174	46.3
		20 & above	107	28.4

Table 1 revealed that a majority of the participants (54%) were 30 – 49 years old. This was followed by those who were 50 years old and above (31%) and under 30 years old (15%). A majority of the participants (58%) were male, while 42% of the participants were female. A majority of the participants

(57%) were academic staff, while 43% of the participants were non-academic staff. Finally, the greatest proportion of the participants (46%) had 10 – 19 years of work experience. This was followed by those who had 20 or more years of work experience (28%) and below 10 years of work experience (25%).

### *Test of Hypotheses*

#### *Hypothesis One*

There is no significant impact of religious diversity on team creativity among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria.

*Table 2: Coefficients of Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Impact of Religious Diversity on Team Creativity*

	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	10.417	6.375		20.724	.000
Religious Diversity	.109	.018	.228	12.816	.000

Dependent Variable: Team Creativity

Table 2 revealed significant results ( $\beta = .228$ ,  $t = 12.816$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). It was therefore concluded that there is a significant impact of religious diversity on team creativity among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. Table 2 further showed that religious diversity is positively associated with team creativity ( $\beta = .228$ ) and that the latter can be predicted from the former by means of the regression equation:

$$\text{Team Creativity} = 0.109 \times \text{Religious Diversity} + 10.417.$$

#### *Hypothesis Two*

There is no significant impact of religious diversity on team innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria.

*Table 3: Coefficients of Simple Linear Regression Analysis for Impact of Religious Diversity on Team Innovation*

	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	6.051	7.081		20.724	.000
Religious Diversity	.137	.013	.256	14.473	.000

Dependent Variable: Team Innovation

Table 3 revealed significant results ( $\beta = .256$ ,  $t = 14.473$ ,  $p < .0005$ ). It was therefore concluded that there is a significant impact of religious diversity on team innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. Table 3 further showed that religious diversity is positively associated with team creativity ( $\beta = .256$ ) and that the latter can be predicted from the former by means of the regression equation:

$$\text{Team Innovation} = 0.137 \times \text{Religious Diversity} + 6.051.$$

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed significant relationships between religious diversity and team creativity and innovation among public university employees in Ogun State, Nigeria. Firstly, the study found a significant positive impact of religious diversity on team creativity. This finding suggests that teams with diverse religious backgrounds tend to exhibit higher levels of creativity. This result agrees with previous studies (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Cox et al., 2020) that found religious diversity to be positively related to team creativity. The positive relationship between religious diversity and team creativity can be attributed to the fact that diverse teams bring different perspectives, ideas and experiences to the workplace, leading to increased creativity.

Secondly, the study found a significant positive impact of religious diversity on team innovation. This finding suggests that teams with diverse religious backgrounds tend to exhibit higher levels of innovation. This result agrees with previous studies (Mor Barak et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2022) that found religious diversity to be positively related to team innovation. The positive relationship between religious diversity and team innovation can be attributed to the fact that diverse teams bring different knowledge, skills and experiences to the workplace, leading to increased innovation.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Public universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, should prioritize promoting religious diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This can be achieved by creating an environment that values and supports different religious beliefs and practices. Organizations can also establish diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as diversity training programmes and employee resource groups, to foster a culture of inclusion.
2. Public universities in Ogun State, Nigeria, should encourage collaborative work among employees from different religious backgrounds. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for employees to work together on projects, share ideas, and learn from each other's perspectives. By doing so, organizations can utilize the benefits of religious diversity to enhance team creativity and innovation.

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