Innovations

Inclusive Workplace and Performance of Manufacturing Firms in Southeast, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on inclusive-workplace and performance of manufacturing firms in Southeast, Nigeria. The study explored the nexus between inclusive workplace and performance; determined the extent to which sense of belonging affects profitability, and ascertained the extent to which access to organization's resources influence service delivery in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. This study adopted a survey research design. The sample size of the study was 456 employees. The study used well-structured questionnaire. The study analyzed data using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Structural Equation Model was used. The study found that sense of belonging has a positive and significant effect on the profitability of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The study further found a positive and significant link between access to resources and service delivery of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The study concluded that there are substantial findings regarding the effects of sense of belonging, access to resources, and sense of authenticity on profitability, service delivery, and innovative activities. The study recommended that manufacturing firms should prioritize creating a sense of belonging among employees, and that it is paramount for manufacturing firms to ensure adequate access to resources.

Keywords: Sense of Belonging, Profitability, Access to Resources, Service Delivery, Sense of Authenticity, Innovative Activities

Introduction

Inclusive workplace has become a new global trend in managing ever-increasing diversity in the workplace. There is ample evidence that social exclusion and economic inequality in the workplace still exist (Shore, Clevelan, and Sanchez, 2017). In most developed economies, employees from social identity groups with a history of discrimination are excluded from beneficial job opportunities like promotions, access to information, participation in decision-making, and human capital investments. As socioeconomic criteria that lead to workplace exclusion continue to develop, a new and different perspective on how to get the best from a diverse workforce has emerged, that is inclusion.

Global demographic changes and predictions of more workplace diversity highlight the need for research on strategies to foster inclusion. Despite the inevitable presence of diversity in the workplace, social exclusion and economic disparity have persisted. In most industrialized economies, laws protecting these groups have been passed in response to discrimination against different racial/ethnic groups, women, those with impairments, and older workers, (Mor Barak, 2015). The number of acknowledged workforce diversity components has increased, as have its benefits. However, the rate of social exclusion at work is on the rise, and there is more research being done on how to combat this issue, because some nations have few or no laws in place to protect the excluded workgroups (Mor Barak&Daya, 2014).Ferdman (2017) posits that individuals with a variety of identities and backgrounds can be authentically themselves in organizations that prioritize inclusivity, while also making a significant contribution to the group's larger goals. In contrast, it can be detrimental to the recipient's psychological and physical health if such people are excluded, regardless of whether it's because of prejudice or a covert type of discrimination.

The goal of diversity studies is to better understand both the positive and negative effects of diversity (Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, and Singh 2011). Given these drawbacks of diversity, researchers have been looking at characteristics and processes that will encourage the development of inclusive workplaces, as well as the effects on both individuals and organizations that strive to maximize employees' differences in the workplace (Mor Barak, 2014).Although distinct, diversity and inclusion in the workplace are related ideas in human resources management. An inclusive workplace goes beyond recognizing the diversity of the workforce to harness, value, and incorporate diversity into daily work life. Diversity focused on the demographics of an organization, whereas an inclusive workplace highlights and encourages employee involvement (Roberson, 2006; Stevens, Plaut, and Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

Organizational performance depends to a large extent on the sincerity and openness of management in their relationship with employees, and organisational processes. The authenticity of leaders has been highly influenced by the organizational culture of inclusiveness because when organizations create an inclusive culture, leaders are motivated to be real, open to varied ideas from subordinates, and encourage employees to collaborate with others to ensure the realization of the organization's set goals. When the work environment is inclusive, it creates a conducive environment for leaders to be themselves and promote also a sense of belonging among the employees which in turn enhances the performance of the organization. It has been observed that leadership styles such as transactional and authoritarian leadership are more prevalent in Nigeria. Most of such leaders rely so much on their ideas and believe that their perspectives on every issue are the best, this denies them the opportunity to receive input from others and hinders the much-needed collaboration in the organization. Ethnic or tribal sentiments have negatively influenced the Nigerian operational environment: most employees are individually attached to people from their tribes. When leaders feel more comfortable having people from their tribes around them, such leaders are often tribal in their recruitment thereby making the workplace less inclusive since some people will feel more or less valued than others.

To reverse the unfavorable economic challenges prevalent in the Nigerian operational environment which has hindered her socio-economic growth and development, our manufacturing firms should work to make workplaces more inclusive. Failure to achieve more inclusiveness in the workplace will affect the performance of manufacturing firms.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to explore the nexus between inclusive workplace and performance of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The specific objectives are, to:

I. Determine the extent to which sense of belonging affects profitability in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

II.   Ascertain the extent to which access to organization's resources influences service delivery in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

III.   Identify the extent to which sense of authenticity affects innovative activities in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

I.   There is a statistically significant direct effect of sense of belonging on the profit margin in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

II.   There is a statistically significant direct effect of access to firms' resources on service delivery in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

III.   There is a statistically significant direct effect of sense of authenticity on innovative activities in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Inclusive Workplace

In the diversity literature, a variety of definitions of inclusion have been utilized (Randel, Dean, Ehrhart, Chung, & Shore, 2016). In general, an inclusive workplace refers to an operational environment that shows how well organizations relate to, interact with, and utilize people from all walks of life (Ferdman, 2017). Within the work group, it is characterized by a sense of security, respect, support, value, trust, fulfillment, engagement, and authenticity (Brimhall, Mor Barak, Hurlburt, McArdle, Palinkas, & Henwood, 2017). The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) describes an inclusive workplace as one in which all workers are treated equitably and respectfully, have equitable access to opportunities and resources, and can fully contribute to the success of the company.

Organizational leaders have been increasingly cognizant of the necessity of building inclusive cultures since workplaces have become more diverse (Nishii & Rich, 2014; Nishii & Leroy, 2021). Simultaneously, inclusion studies are still in their infancy. Mor Barak and her colleagues in the field of social work were the first to conduct a thorough study of workplace inclusion (Mor Barak &Cherin, 1998). Researchers have increasingly worked to highlight that inclusion is vital to all, particularly to those who have been historically excluded (Ferdman, 2014; Tang, Zheng, & Chen, 2017). Individuals from all backgrounds, not just members of historically prominent identity groups, are treated respectfully, valued for who they are, and included in key decision-making processes (Nishii, 2014).

Mor Barak and Daya (2014) assert that an exclusionary workplace is based on the belief that all employees must adhere to pre-established organizational values and norms as determined by its powerful group, while an inclusive workplace is based on a multi-ethnic value frame that respects all cultural perspectives represented among its employees. An inclusive workplace provides opportunities for individuals of socially disadvantaged people to participate effectively while also supporting employees in their attempts to be fully themselves at all levels of an organization.

The concept of an inclusive workplace emphasizes the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work environment. In an inclusive environment, employees are involved in decision-making; have access to relevant work information and organizational resources; and enjoy job security - the likelihood that an employee will retain his/her job without losing his/her

personal identity, values, norms, etc. (Shore et al., 2011; Zheng, Diaz, Zheng, & Tang, 2017). Miller and Katz (2007) posit that an organization is inclusive when everyone has a sense of belonging, feels respected, valued, and seen for who they are as individuals, and experiences a great level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues, and others, such that all people - individually and collectively - can perform optimally. Hwang and Hopkins (2015) see the construct as revolving around the sense of belonging, feeling respected and valued; when these are guaranteed, employees' performance is maximized.

Ferdman (2011) defines an inclusive workplace as a work environment in which employees are encouraged to be fully themselves and allow others to be fully themselves in the context of engaging in common pursuits. Furthermore, he stressed that inclusion requires collaboration that allows all parties to be fully engaged and subsumed, while at the same time believing that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up any part of themselves. In other words, the inclusive experience for an individual in a group or organization involves being fully part of the whole while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness (Brimhall et al., 2017).

Diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably by many organizations, while some use the title of Chief Diversity Officer, others Chief Inclusion Officer, and still others Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. However, their main responsibility is how best to manage diversity and inclusion practices in their various organizations. Drawing a line of demarcation between diversity and inclusion, Winters (2014, p. 206) posits that "perhaps the most salient distinction between diversity and inclusion is that diversity can be mandated and legislated, while inclusion stems from voluntary actions." Consequently, inclusion requires creating a level playing field and providing equal access to valued opportunities for workers who belong to social identity groups that experience greater discrimination through organizational and managerial practices (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, &Sürgevil, 2011; Gotsis &Grimani, 2016).

The increasing workforce diversity has brought women, people of color, and members of other marginalized groups into the workplace. An inclusive work environment creates equal access to decision-making, organizational resources, and promotion opportunities for these individuals. There are values that people with a variety of differences bring to the organization; however, diversity does not always bring beneficial results to organizations; it can increase conflict and employee turnover, and lower cohesion and performance. Inclusive workplace or inclusionary practices create and promote the potential advantages and opportunities of having a diverse workforce (Ferdman, 2014; Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Mannix & Neale, 2005).

The Office of Personnel Management (2011, p. 5) defines inclusion "as a culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals can participate and contribute to their full potential." Furthermore, they assert that inclusion "focuses new attention on the policies, practices, and climate of the workplace - the workplace culture - that shapes the experiences of employees with their differences and characteristics."

Sense of Belonging

Belongingness is a fundamental human need defined as the need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships (Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang, Wu, 2014). To fulfill this need for belongingness, people choose social identities with particular groups and seek acceptance into those groups. The acceptance, and the sense of connection with others that it creates prevents the isolation that may occur if one becomes highly individuated (Wang et al., 2014). There are many advantages associated with

being an accepted member of a group; individuals attribute positive characteristics to other members of their in-groups and display in-group favoritism (Ferdman, 2014).

Loyalty, cooperation, and trustworthiness among group members enhance the security of individual members. However, if members of such groups are perceived as too similar, then individuals become interchangeable and the need for uniqueness (the need to maintain a distinctive and differentiated sense of self is unfulfilled, (Brewer, 2012; Xue, Zhao, Li, & Lin, 2017). When this need becomes activated, individuals define themselves in terms of category memberships that distinguish themselves from others by making comparisons within their group, or to others outside their group. Individuals opt to socially identify with a particular group when it allows for the satisfaction of needs for both belongingness and uniqueness, (Tang, Jiang, Chen, Zhou, Chen, & Yu, 2015).

Access to Organisational Resources

One of the three indicators of inclusion is access to relevant work information otherwise called involvement in the work group by many scholars, which is critical for effective and efficient service delivery. Collaborating this assertion, Shore et al(2011) posit that access to information and organizational resources is the degree to which an employee is kept well-informed about the company's business objectives and plans; has an equal opportunity to excel according to his/her skill.

When an employee has access to relevant work information and resources, he/she feels included, and this sense of feeling in the collective is a powerful determinant of action and strengthens affective commitment to the organization. This sense of feeling makes one perceive oneself as psychologically linked to the organization, experiencing the successes and failures of the organization as his/her own (Hwang & Hopkins, 2015). Access to relevant work information and resources beyond equipping an employee to do his/her job well, emotionally makes the employee feel fully part of the organization because it assures the employee that he/she is valued, accepted, and appreciated leading to optimal job performance, and organizational productivity (Carmeli et al., 2010; Chung, Ehrhart, Shore, Randel, Dean, &Kedharnath, 2016).

Sense of Authenticity

Essentially authenticity involves bringing your "true self" to work and every employee aspires to maintain his/her unique identity even in the workplace, (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv, (2010). Ferdman (2014) posits that the experience of inclusion includes among other things the feeling of emotional safety, the element of trust, acceptance, respect and fully bringing one's true self to work, such an inclusive environment enhances job satisfaction, commitment, and enhanced productivity. Inclusion involves both being fully ourselves and allowing others to be fully themselves in the context of engaging in common pursuits. Inclusion requires collaborating in such ways that allow all parties to be fully engaged and subsumed, and yet, paradoxically, at the same time believe that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up any part of themselves. It involves being fully part of the whole while retaining a sense of uniqueness(Shore et al., 2016). Shore *et al*., (2011) assert that inclusion requires that members are treated as insiders, and also allowed or encouraged to retain their uniqueness within the workgroup. Cottrill, Lopez, and Hoffman, (2014) argue that there is a need for management to support every individual to reach his/her full potential without requiring assimilation but allow them to bring their true selves to work.

The level of psychological safety employees experience in an inclusive workplace provides an enabling environment that supports not only employee growth but also promotes experimentation of ideas that can result in creativity and innovation (Carmeli et al., 2010; Chung et al., 2016). Management can create an inclusive climate that promotes a sense of authenticity by encouraging diverse contributions in the

workplace, paying special attention to soliciting different perspectives and approaches that can contribute to performance, For instance, a more experienced employee in a work group who is new to the organization could be encouraged to offer a perspective on how similar work problems have been successfully dealt with in the past at his or her previous employers, such that his or her experience and perspective is introduced into a group's discussion. (Mor Barak &Daya, 2014; Shore et al., 2011; Winters, 2014).

Concept of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance has become a ubiquitous concept in literature, and one of the most significant variables in management studies. Various meanings and allusions have been offered by umpteen researchers about the concept especially due to the variances in the contexts wherein the concept is being used. This has made a universal definition of the term very irksome to arrive at due to the lack of consensus among researchers on how best to develop and measure the construct. However, a major theme of performance conceptualization is that it is at the core of every firm's corporate strategic management, and thus all of the firm's actions and processes are aimed at meeting or improving performance targets, and continue to survive in perpetuity.

Despite being widely used in academic literature; its definition is challenging due to its varied interpretations. There is no universally recognized single definition of performance (Nzeadibe, Ajaero, Okonkwo, Okpoko, Akukwe, & Njoku-Tony, 2015). In the 1950s, the amount to which companies achieved their goals was considered organizational performance. During this time, work, people, and organizational structure were the main topics of performance evaluation. Performance was later described (during the 1960s and 1970s) as an organization's capacity to take advantage of its surroundings to obtain and utilize scarce resources. An organization is successful if it achieves its goals (effectiveness) while using the fewest resources (efficiency). Organizational theories that followed supported this idea that an organization achieves its performance objectives based on the constraints imposed by limited resources.

Service Delivery

The performance of specific work or effort, though it cannot be owned, is included in the definition of service. Typically, services are provided by the effort of individuals or through a mechanical effort directed toward specific individuals. Delivering high-quality services that will delight clients is the key to maintaining a competitive advantage in today's fiercely competitive business market. The sum of the customer's interactions and experiences with the company determines how satisfied they are overall. Similar to service quality, customer satisfaction can occur at different organizational levels. For instance, satisfaction with the contact person, satisfaction with the core service, and satisfaction with the business as a whole

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) assert that businesses can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty, and as a result, their long-term and sustainable profitability ratio. This is done by offering high-quality services to their clients. To achieve high levels of service quality and, thus, create larger values for their customers and other stakeholders, organizations must carefully plan the delivery of their services. Consequently, the Service Delivery System's success depends on careful planning and the efficient implementation of defined delivery plans (SDS). Continuous service procedure improvement also improves the organization's level of delivered services while optimizing SDS. Employees in the service industry are inspired to provide excellent customer service by being included in the process.

Innovation

Innovation occurs either through the introduction of something new, or a new concept, method, or gadget. The first concept depicts innovation as a result, whereas the second depicts it as a process. To better comprehend innovation, it should be seen as both a result and a method. Companies that define

innovation as just one of these will not succeed in their endeavors. Organizations that are only concerned with the result will minimize the process, which will result in inefficiencies like wasted resources and effort duplication, (Purwanto, Asbari, Hartuti, Setana, & Fahmi, 2021). Organizations that are preoccupied with the process frequently build bureaucracies that make it too difficult to realize the result. A balanced view encompassing outcome and process is crucial, with a third consideration necessary as well: mindset.

In an inclusive workplace, leadership creates a culture that encourages employees to come up with new and innovative solutions at the workplace, (Liu, Fuller, Hester, Bennett, & Dickerson, 2018; Xue et al., 2017). Consequently, such leaders with a clear vision that supports openness, improve individual and team performance by building trust among the employees, (Wang et al., 2014). The trust that employees have in their leaders' sincerity serves as a catalyst for innovation among them, (Novitasari, Siswanto, Purwanto, and Fahmi, 2020). Leaders in the organization should be genuine if they want to maximize innovative work behavior (IWB). Employees can engage in IWB at work when their leader supports them and gives them the independence and freedom to do so.

Moreover, true leadership may inspire workers to express their individuality while preserving the group's cohesion (by supporting employees, ensuring fairness and equity, and sharing solutions). The employees might use authentic leaders as a benchmark to support their IWB since they foster transparency in the workplace, (Wu, and Chen, 2019). As well as encouraging openness, truthfulness, accessibility, and dedication in interpersonal interactions, an authentic leader must be actively involved in workplace quality improvement, (Baek, Han, and Ryu, 2019). Through appropriate management, authentic leaders create opportunities for employees to think with greater responsibility and independence in decision making which ultimately stimulates their workplace innovative capability.

Leaders who are an essential component of the corporate environment can be anticipated to have a considerable impact on employees' thinking and cognitive processes, which stimulates their innovative work behavior, (Fang et al., 2019). When authentic leaders establish deep bonds with their followers by cultivating relationships with them that are founded on honesty, trust, compassion, and high moral principles These characteristics of a genuine leader enhance the inclusiveness of the work environment which eventually results in shared values, and authenticity among staff members who are then willing to participate in various innovative initiatives.

Profitability

The capacity to earn profit from an organization's operations is referred to as profitability. It demonstrates how well the organization's management generates income by utilizing the resources at its disposal. Profitability is defined as the relationship between income and some balance sheet measure that depicts the relative ability to make money on assets utilized; it gauges efficiency and, ultimately, its success or failure. Additionally, profitability refers to a company's capacity to generate profit in comparison to other investments based on its resources. The primary goal of business is to create value and make a profit, and the volume of earnings a company generates is a good indicator of its effectiveness; the larger the volume of profits, the more effective the company is. Return on investment (ROI) or return on capital used are two terms used to describe how profitable a company is by comparing the quantity of capital used (the input) with the money generated (the output - ROCE).

One of the most crucial aims of financial management is to maximize owners' wealth, and profitability is one of the key factors influencing performance. A business that is not lucrative cannot thrive. A very lucrative company, on the other hand, has the potential to give its owners a substantial return on their

investment. Therefore, a company's primary objective is to make money because doing so will assure the continued expansion and viability of the company (Ahmed, Abdullah, and Shaharudin, 2020).

The goal of profitability analysis is to categorize metrics and evaluate the firm's performance in terms of the profits realized, either in connection to the capital invested by shareholders in the company or relation to sales, profit, or both. Profit generated by a company can be used to assess the performance of an investment because the majority of business owners invest to generate a return, (Ahmed, Abdullah, Shaharudin, and Putri, 2020). Profitability is the ability of the organization to generate income; hence, a failure to do so immediately denotes a loss. However, profitability is attained if the income generated is larger than the input cost, on the contrary, performance is poor if the income is lower than the input cost (Hashim, Ries, and Huai, 2019).

Inclusive Workplace and Organisational Performance

Diversity in the workforce has been viewed as essential to organizational success. However, the success of an organization can only be improved by diversity management initiatives if the organization values the diversity of its workforce. Inclusion extends beyond diversity management to ensuring that people from different origins, mindsets, and ways of thinking may effectively work together as a team and individually to perform at their best, attaining organizational set goals based on established good principles (Pless and Maak, 2004; Choi, 2017). Many researchers concur that job commitment and performance are influenced by the feeling of inclusion. Additionally, they affirm that to create inclusive environments, strong leadership is needed. This leadership must be committed, dedicated, and ensure that everyone is treated fairly and given the opportunity to participate in decisions that will have an impact on both their individual and organizational well-being, (Cho and Mor- Barak, 2008; Ryan and Kossek, 2008; Hwang and Hopkins, 2015).

An inclusive organizational climate encourages participation from a wide variety of people, each with their special viewpoints and skills, which leads to a more effective and successful organization. Uniqueness and belongingness, according, work together to create an inclusive work environment, which ultimately improves performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, intention to stay, and overall well-being of employees, (Shore et al, 2011; Choi, 2017). Numerous studies on inclusion support the notion that creating an environment that fosters positive interactions, vision- and strategy-driven inclusive culture building, information dissemination, worker productivity recognition, fostering a sense of belonging among organizational employees, and open communication are just a few ways to create an environment that is conducive to performance (Shore et al, 2011; Randel, Dean, Ehrhart, Chung and Shore, 2016).

Fig. 1   Conceptual Framework
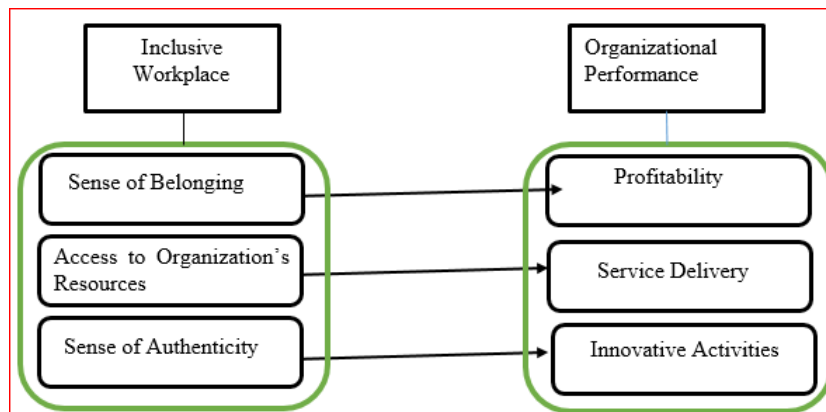
Source: Researcher's Design

In the context of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria, the study establishes that sense of belonging has a possible effect on profitability (as shown in Figure 1. This implies that when employees within these manufacturing firms experience a higher sense of belonging, it positively influences the financial performance of the organization. A strong sense of belonging fosters a positive work environment where employees feel motivated, engaged, and committed to their work. When individuals feel a sense of connection and belonging within the organization, they are more likely to invest their time and effort into their job, leading to increased productivity and efficiency. This, in turn, can positively impact the profitability of the manufacturing firm.

Figure 1 also shows that access to resources can influence service delivery. Resources play a critical role in enabling manufacturing firms to meet customer demands and expectations. Adequate access to resources such as raw materials, equipment, technology, and a skilled workforce ensures that manufacturing firms have the necessary means to produce goods and deliver services effectively and efficiently. Insufficient or limited access to these resources can lead to delays, quality issues, or even the inability to meet customer requirements, which can have a negative impact on service delivery. Access to resources influences the capacity and capability of manufacturing firms to respond to market demands and changing conditions. When manufacturing firms have sufficient resources, they are better equipped to adapt to fluctuations in customer needs, market trends, or competitive pressures.

In the context of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria, figure 1 shows that sense of authenticity can affect innovative activities. When employees feel a sense of authenticity, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of creativity and original thinking. By allowing individuals to express their true selves and encouraging them to bring their unique perspectives and ideas to the table, manufacturing firms create an environment that fosters innovation. Employees who feel authentic are more willing to take risks, challenge conventional thinking, and propose new solutions or approaches, leading to the generation of innovative ideas.

Theoretical Review

The study adopted the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT). The ODTopine that people's inherent demands for belongingness and individuality are in opposition to one another (Brewer, 1991; Brewer &Roccas, 2001). The desire for a sense of belonging drives people to establish and preserve solid, enduring relationships with others. People are anticipated to engage in regular, emotive, and joyful interactions in a temporary but stable group to satiate this desire (Leornardelli, Pickett, & Brewer,

2010). Contrarily, the need for uniqueness is what drives people to have a distinct self-concept. To satiate this need, people must meaningfully distance themselves from others by downplaying their similarities to them or by defining themselves in terms of their eccentric qualities and viewpoints (Leszczensky, Flache, Stark, and Munniksma, 2018). Importantly, ODT asserts that these two demands conflict if they are pursued at the same level, such as the intra-group level; people tend to feel less unique and independent as they grow closer to others (Schumpe, Herzberg, and Erb, 2016).

In contrast to this prediction, and line with Shore et al. (2011)'s definition of inclusion as the simultaneous satisfaction of the need for belongingness and uniqueness, scholars concur and have empirically demonstrated that an increased sense of belonging to a group does not necessarily result in a diminished sense of individual uniqueness (Leornardelli&Loyd, 2016). Individuals can simultaneously satiate their needs for uniqueness and belongingness by taking on a specific role within the group or joining one that allows them to express their individuality (Lornardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). Those who have a sense of belonging to the group and who are also recognized for their unique, distinguishing features are said to be a part of the group (Shore et al., 2011).

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design. The study's population consisted of four thousand nine hundred and eighty-three (4983) staff of selected manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The sample size of the study was 456 employees from the selected manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria. The sample was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) statistical formula. The formula is stated as:

$$n = \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2 N - 1 + X^2 P(1-P)}$$

Where:

n	=	Sample size
x^2	=	The table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841).
N	=	The population size.
P	=	The population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 since this would provide the maximum sample size).
d	=	the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05).

The profile of the respondents is stated in Table 1. The study used a well-structured questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire for this study was ascertained through the determination of its internal consistency by testing it using the Cronbach alpha coefficient as the test statistic for measuring the reliability of the construct. The study analyzed data using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The structural Equation Model was used. The models of the study are specified as follows:

PERF= f(INW).. 1
PRO = β_0 + β_1SOB + ε... 2
SDY = β0 + β_1AOR + ε... 3
IAS = β0 + β_1SOA + ε.. 4
Where;

PERF represents performance
PRO represents the profitability
IAS represents innovative activities.
SOB represents sense of belonging.

AOR represents access to organization's resources.
SOA represents sense of authenticity.
β_0 is the intercept term.
β_1 is the coefficient
ε represents the error term

Analyses and Results

Table 1 Participant profile

Profile	Response	No.	Percent
Gender	Male	254	57.5
	Female	188	42.5
Age Distribution	18—30	127	28.7
	3l—42	176	39.8
	4l—50	81	18.3
	43-54	58	13.1
Work Experience	1-5years	112	25.3
	6-10years	209	47.3
	11-15years	77	17.4
	16-20years	30	6.8
	21-25years	11	2.5
	Above 25 years	3	.7
Academic Qualification	ND/NCE/Equivalent	149	33.7
	HND/BSC	252	57.0
	PGD/MSC/MBA	16	3.6
	PhD	25	5.7

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The gender profile reveals that out of the total respondents, 254 identified as male, accounting for 57.5% of the total respondents. On the other hand, 188 respondents identified as female, comprising 42.5% of the total respondents.

The table shows that there were 127 respondents in the age range of 18 to 30, representing 28.7% of the total respondents. Additionally, there were 176 respondents in the age range of 31 to 42, making up 39.8% of the total respondents. Furthermore, 81 respondents fell in the age range of 41 to 50, accounting for 18.3% of the total respondents. Finally, 58 respondents were in the age range of 43 to 54, comprising 13.1% of the total respondents.

The table indicates that 112 respondents have work experience of 1 to 5 years, accounting for 25.3% of the total respondents. Additionally, 209 respondents have work experience of 6 to 10 years, representing 47.3% of the total respondents. 77 respondents have work experience of 11 to 15 years, comprising 17.4% of the total respondents. Moreover, 30 respondents have work experience of 16 to 20 years, making up 6.8% of the total respondents. 11 respondents have work experience of 21 to 25 years, accounting for 2.5% of the total respondents. Lastly, 3 respondents have work experience of more than 25 years, representing 0.7% of the total respondents.

The table reveals that 149 respondents hold qualifications such as ND/NCE/Equivalent, representing 33.7% of the total respondents. 252 respondents have qualifications such as HND/BSC, comprising 57.0% of the total respondents. 16 respondents hold qualifications such as PGD/MSC/MBA, making up 3.6% of the total respondents. Lastly, 25 respondents possess a Ph.D. qualification, accounting for 5.7% of the total respondents.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Construct and Reliability

	Sense of belonging	**Mean**	**Std Dev**	**CR**	**Factor Loading**
SOB1	At work, employees feel socially connected, communicate, and relate as friends.	3.4389	1.27673	.767	.96
SOB2	Employees care for; treat each other as valued and esteemed members of the group in our workplace.	3.1855	1.38242		1.06
SOB3	Employees are treated fairly without discrimination not minding their social identities or positions in the office.	3.7670	1.17514		.77
SOB4	I feel accepted in my workplace.	3.1448	1.33226		1.00
	Access to organization's resources				
AOR1	In my workplace, employees have easy access to things needed to do their job well.	3.6561	1.08141	.764	.85
AOR2	In our workplace, we share relevant information needed to do our jobs well without hiding some.	3.5520	1.16575		1.02
AOR3	The availability of required resources at the workplace enhances employees' job performance and happiness in the workplace.	3.5747	1.10660		1.23
AOR4	Employees perform better when they have access to relevant information and resources.	3.5452	1.43932		1.00
	Sense of authenticity				
SOA1	At work, workers are open; express their ideas and perspectives in ways that they feel real and whole.	3.4140	1.33608	.870	.92
SOA2	Employees are not afraid to express how they feel, or their opinions on issues affecting our organization.	3.1290	1.21559		.88
SOA3	Other people's opinions strongly influence what I do in my place of work.	2.8439	1.32329		1.01
SOA4	Employees hide part of their real-self for fear of being ridiculed, and while having genuine conversations at work.	2.9796	1.28025		1.00
	Profitability				
PRO1	We have had satisfactory and consistent profit in recent times.	3.7036	1.06498	.826	.86
PRO2	Our company has not witnessed profit reduction lately.	3.7738	1.20597		.94
PRO3	There have been no worries concerning shareholder's equity.	3.5837	1.16390		.68
	Service Delivery				

SDY1	Employees will serve customers better if they have easy access to relevant information and resources.	3.0181	1.28647	.843	.79
SDY2	When employees are happy, they do their jobs more excellently.	3.2149	1.32530		.88
SDY3	Employees that have access to the organization's resources are more productive.	2.9072	1.34788		.75
	Innovative activities				
IAS1	Our firm encourages new ideas in the workplace.	3.6471	1.13982	.854	.90
IAS2	We often seek to improve ways of doing things in our Workplace.	3.5747	1.13892		.84
IAS3	Our firm invests much in research and development to improve our operations.	3.4027	1.19173		.71

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 2 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, construct reliability (CR), and factor loadings for each construct. However, the construct reliabilities have values above 0.70 threshold. This indicates that the constructs have internal consistencies.
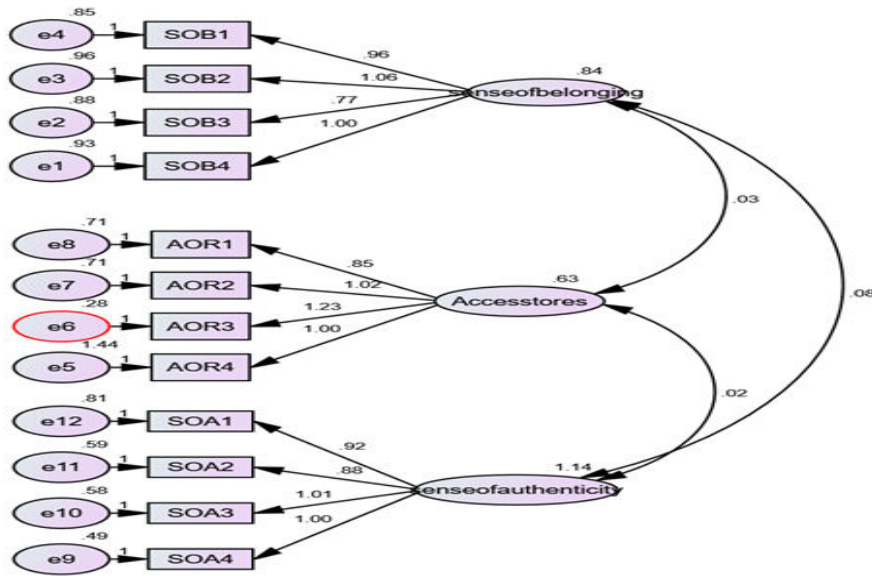
Fig 2.Structural Equation Model

Table 3.Covariance of Latent Variables

Latent Variables			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
Sense of belonging	<-->	Sense of authenticity	.075	.057	1.320	.187
Sense of belonging	<-->	Access to resources	.032	.043	.738	.461
Access to resources	<-->	Sense of authenticity	.020	.047	.433	.665

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 3 shows the covariance analysis and explored the relationships between three latent variables: Sense of Belonging, Sense of Authenticity, and Access to Resources (see Figure 2). The first analysis examined the covariance between Sense of Belonging and Sense of Authenticity. The estimate of 0.075 indicated a positive covariance, suggesting a potential relationship between these variables. However,

the standard error of 0.057 indicated some uncertainty in the estimate. The critical ratio of 1.320 indicated that the covariance was not statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of 0.05, as the p-value of 0.187 was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it is not possible to confidently conclude a significant covariance between Sense of Belonging and Sense of Authenticity based on these results.

Similarly, the second analysis explored the covariance between Sense of Belonging and Access to Resources. The estimate of 0.032 indicated a positive but relatively small covariance. The standard error of 0.043 suggested some uncertainty in the estimate. The critical ratio of 0.738 indicated that the covariance was not statistically significant, as the p-value of 0.461 was greater than 0.05. Thus, the results did not support a significant covariance between Sense of Belonging and Access to Resources.

The third analysis examined the covariance between Access to Resources and Sense of Authenticity. The estimate of 0.020 indicated a positive but very small covariance. The standard error of 0.047 introduced a relatively high level of uncertainty. The critical ratio of 0.433 indicated that the covariance was not statistically significant, as the p-value of 0.665 exceeded 0.05. Consequently, a significant covariance between Access to Resources and Sense of Authenticity could not be established based on these results. However, the results show all the covariances are less than 50%, that is they are relatively small covariance estimates. Therefore, there is no issue of autocorrelation.

Table 4.Model Fit Summary

	RMR, GFI		Baseline Comparisons		RMSEA
	Default model	**Saturated model**	**Default model**	**Saturated model**	**Default model**
RMR	.088	.000			
GFI	.943	1.000			
AGFI	.913				
PGFI	.616				
NFI			.916	1.000	
RFI			.891		
IFI			.941	1.000	
TLI			.922		
CFI			.940	1.000	
RMSEA					.048
LO 90					.059
HI 90					.083
PCLOSE					.058

Source: Amos 24

Table 4 shows the model fit summary. The table provides information on how well the fitted model matches the observed data. RMR (Root Mean Square Residual) measures the average discrepancy between the observed covariance matrix and the model-implied covariance matrix. In the default model, the RMR value is 0.088, indicating a relatively small discrepancy between the model and the observed data. GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) assesses the proportion of variance and covariance accounted for by the model. The GFI value is 0.943, indicating a good fit where 94.3% of the variance and covariance are explained by the model. AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) is a variant of GFI that adjusts for degrees of freedom. The AGFI value is 0.913, suggesting a good fit even after considering the complexity of the model. PGFI (Parsimony Goodness of Fit Index) evaluates the model fit while considering its complexity. The PGFI value is 0.616, indicating that the model fits well while maintaining parsimony.

The saturated model represents a perfect fit to the data, as indicated by an RMR value of 0.000 and a GFI value of 1.000.

Additional fit indices are reported, including NFI (Normed Fit Index), RFI (Relative Fit Index), IFI (Incremental Fit Index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index), and CFI (Comparative Fit Index). These indices compare the fit of the default model to the saturated and independent models. Higher values indicate a better fit. The default model exhibits a reasonably good fit based on these indices. RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) assesses the discrepancy between the model and the population covariance matrix. The RMSEA value is 0.048, indicating a close fit between the model and the population covariance matrix. The LO 90 and HI 90 values represent the lower and upper bounds of the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA. The PCLOSE value of 0.058 suggests that the RMSEA estimate is not statistically significant. However, the model demonstrates a good fit to the data based on various fit indices, suggesting that it adequately represents the relationships among the variables.
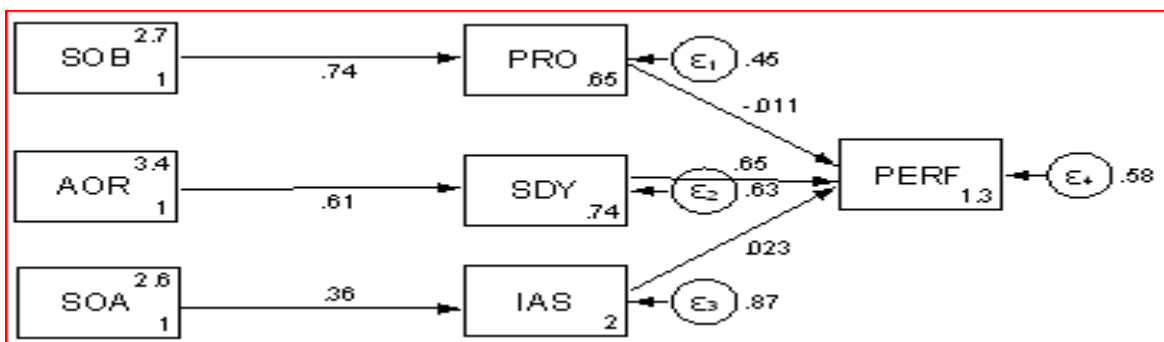
Fig. 3   Path Analysis of Variables

Table 5 Coefficient on Variables

Structural (PRO)	Est.	Std. Err.	Z	p-value	[95% Conf. Interval]	
SOB	.7414698	.034933	21.23	0.000	.6730023	.8099373
_cons	.6547862	.1060998	6.17	0.000	.4468343	.8627381
SDY						
AOR	.6100615	.0438625	13.91	0.000	.5240926	.6960303
_cons	.737656	.1408908	5.24	0.000	.4615152	1.013797
IAS						
SOA	.3637065	.0488003	7.45	0.000	.2680597	.4593534
_cons	2.001739	.1644186	12.17	0.000	1.679484	2.323993
PERF						
PRO	-.011066	.0430791	-0.26	0.797	-.0954995	.0733676
SDY	.6484425	.0446653	14.52	0.000	.5609	.7359849
IAS	.0232254	.0389903	0.60	0.551	-.0531941	.0996449
_cons	1.263856	.2214897	5.71	0.000	.8297446	1.697968

Source: Field Survey (2023)

SOB= Sense of Belonging; AOR= Access to Organisation's Resources; SOA= Sense of Authenticity; PRO= Profitability; SDY= Service Delivery; IAS= Innovative Activities

Table 5 provides valuable insights into the estimated effects of latent variables within the model. The coefficient for sense of belonging is estimated as 0.7414698, and this shows a positive and statistically significant relationship between sense of belonging and profitability. This demonstrates that a higher

sense of belonging is associated with increased profitability. The low p-value of 0.000 reveals that this association is highly unlikely to occur by chance.

PRO = .6547862 + .7414698SOB

The constant term (_cons) coefficient is estimated as 0.6547862, and this represents the intercept of the equation. Its statistical significance (p-value = 0.000) shows that there is a significant baseline level of profitability that is not accounted for by the other variables in the model. This implies the presence of other influential factors affecting profitability beyond the variable (sense of belonging) considered.

The coefficient for access to resources is estimated as 0.6100615 and indicates a positive and statistically significant relationship between access to resources and service delivery. This implies that greater access to resources leads to improved service delivery. The p-value of 0.000 shows that this relationship is highly unlikely to be due to chance

SDY = .737656 + .6100615AOR

The constant term (_cons) coefficient is estimated as 0.737656 and reveals a significant baseline level of service delivery that is not explained by the other variables in the model. This implies the presence of unaccounted factors affecting service delivery.

The coefficient for sense of authenticity is estimated as 0.3637065, and this reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between sense of authenticity and innovative activities. This shows that a stronger sense of authenticity is associated with increased engagement in innovative activities. The p-value of 0.000 demonstrates a high level of statistical significance.

IAS = 2.001739 + .3637065SOA

The constant term (_cons) coefficient is estimated as 2.001739, and this implies a significant baseline level of innovative activities that are not elucidated by the other variables in the model. This signifies the presence of additional factors influencing Innovative Activities beyond the variables considered.

The coefficient for profitability is estimated as -0.011066, and this shows a small negative relationship between profitability and performance. This coefficient is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.797), and this indicates that there is insufficient evidence to conclude a significant impact of profitability in this model. The coefficient for service delivery is estimated as 0.6484425, and this reveals a positive and statistically significant relationship between service delivery and performance. This indicates that higher levels of service delivery are associated with improved performance. The low p-value of 0.000 supports the statistical significance of this relationship. The coefficient for innovative activities is estimated as 0.0232254, and this implies a small positive relationship between innovative activities and performance. This coefficient is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.551), and it indicates that the evidence for a significant impact of innovative activities on performance is lacking.

Discussion

The result (β=0.7414698) established that sense of belonging has approximately 74.1% direct effect on profitability. Thus, this study found that sense of belonging has a positive and significant effect on the profitability of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. This aligns with the finding of Dewi and Suryamarta (2020) that sense of belonging significantly affects performance.

The result (β=0.6100615) also shows that access to resources has a 61%-unit increase in service delivery. Based on this, the study found a positive and significant link between access to resources and service delivery of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. Similarly, access to resources strongly affects the service delivery of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. This advances the finding of Mulandi and Christine (2022) that the allocation of resources had a significant influence on the delivery

of services. This is because the study on access to resources is connected to the ability or opportunity for individuals, organizations, or communities to obtain and utilize necessary or desired resources.

The result (0.3637065) for sense of authenticity indicates the possibility of a 36.4%-unit increase in the innovative activities of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. An increase in sense of authenticity will lead to an increase in the innovative activities of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. Thus, the study found that a sense of authenticity has a positive and significant relationship with the innovative activities of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. This supports the finding of Bai, Wang, Alam, Gul, and Wang (2022)that authentic leadership has a favorable and notable impact on innovative behaviors.

Implications of the Study

The study's findings have important implications for manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. Firstly, it highlights the significant effect of a sense of belonging on profitability. The research establishes that a higher sense of belonging among employees is associated with a substantial increase in profitability, emphasizing the need for organizations to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment. Business leaders and managers need to consider implementing strategies that promote a sense of belonging to enhance financial performance.

Secondly, the study reveals a strong positive relationship between access to resources and service delivery. It underscores the critical role of resources in facilitating improved service delivery within manufacturing firms. To enhance their ability to provide high-quality services, organizations need to prioritize adequate resource allocation. This involves identifying and securing the necessary resources to optimize service delivery and maintain competitiveness in the market.

Lastly, the research identifies a positive and significant link between a sense of authenticity and innovative activities within manufacturing firms. A higher sense of authenticity among employees is associated with a notable increase in innovative behaviors. Business leaders need to recognize the importance of authenticity in leadership and create a work culture that encourages employees to express their true selves. This approach fosters creativity and innovation within the organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides insightful information into the relationship between key variables and outcomes in manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria. The results demonstrated substantial findings regarding the effects of sense of belonging, access to resources, and sense of authenticity on profitability, service delivery, and innovative activities. The study established that a sense of belonging has a positive and significant effect on the profitability of manufacturing firms. With a direct effect of sense of belonging, the profitability of manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria can be increased. The research demonstrated a strong positive relationship between access to resources and service delivery. An increase in service delivery is associated with improved access to resources within manufacturing firms. The study identified a positive and significant relationship between a sense of authenticity and innovative activities in manufacturing firms. An increase in innovative activities is linked to a higher sense of authenticity.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to manufacturing firms in South-East, Nigeria:

- Manufacturing firms should prioritize creating a sense of belonging among employees. This can be achieved by promoting a supportive and inclusive work environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and connected. Business leaders should implement strategies such as team-building activities, mentorship programs, and open communication channels to enhance the sense of belonging. By fostering a strong sense of belonging, manufacturing firms can promote employee engagement, motivation, and loyalty, which are key drivers of profitability.
- It is paramount for manufacturing firms to ensure adequate access to resources. They should conduct thorough assessments to identify resource gaps and develop strategies to bridge them. This is likely to involve optimizing resource allocation, exploring partnerships, and investing in infrastructure or technology upgrades.
- Manufacturing firms should promote authentic leadership and cultivate a culture that encourages authenticity among employees. Leaders should lead by example, displaying genuine and transparent behaviors that inspire trust and foster a sense of authenticity throughout their organizations. Manufacturing firms can also establish channels for employees to express their ideas and creativity freely, providing opportunities for innovation and collaboration. By nurturing a culture of authenticity and innovation, manufacturing firms can unlock the full potential of their employees and drive continuous improvement.

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