

Role of Policy in Advancing Equity in the Workplace in Nigeria

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Equity in the workplace is essential for fostering a fair and inclusive environment where all employees can thrive. Policy plays a critical role in advancing equity by addressing systemic barriers, promoting diversity, and ensuring equal opportunities for all employees. The implementation of effective equity policies, organisations can create a more inclusive and fairer workplace environment, driving better outcomes for employees and the organisation as a whole. Policy plays a crucial role in advancing equity, and organisations that prioritise equity are likely to reap significant benefits. This paper explores the importance of policy in promoting workplace equity, key policy areas, and best practices for implementation. Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a framework for understanding the role of policy in advancing equity in the workplace and Organisational Justice Theory (OJT) provides a framework for understanding the role of policy in advancing equity in the workplace. Implementing these strategies, organisations can create a more equitable workplace culture that values diversity, promotes inclusion, and supports the success of all employees. The paper suggests the following</i></p> <p>Keywords: Role, Policy, Advancing, Equity, Workplace.</p>
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Introduction

In an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, fostering equity in the workplace is not merely a matter of social responsibility, but a strategic imperative for organisational success. This paper delves into the crucial role that policy plays in advancing equity, examining how targeted and inclusive policies can dismantle systemic barriers, promote fair treatment, and create workplaces where all employees can thrive. By exploring the transformative potential of policy, this paper aims to shed light on how organisations can move beyond rhetoric and cultivate truly equitable environments. Policies play a crucial role in advancing equity in the workplace by establishing guidelines and commitments that ensure all individuals, regardless of their background, are treated with respect and have fair access to opportunities and resources. These policies aim to remove systemic barriers, address individual needs, and create a culture where everyone can thrive.

A policy is a set of guidelines, rules, or principles that guide decision-making and behaviour within an organisation, institution, or government. Policies are designed to

establish standards, defining expectations and norms for behaviour, actions, and decisions (Bridges, 2017). Policy is understood as a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve desired outcomes. Policies can be statements of intent, implemented as procedures or protocols, and often involve identifying goals and choosing means to achieve them. They can also be seen as a course of action selected from alternatives to guide present and future decisions. In essence, policy involves a deliberate course of action, often with a long-term purpose, and can encompass various aspects of decision-making, implementation, and the resulting actions.

The Term Equity

Equity signifies the concept of fairness and justice, distinguishing it from equality. Equality means giving everyone the same treatment or resources, but equity recognizes that people start from various social, economic, and personal situations and therefore needs to make changes on purpose to fix any existing inequities. The word comes from the Latin word *aequus*, which means "fair" or "balanced." This reflects the idea of proportional justice in

how opportunities and value are shared. In a broader sense, equity can also mean the actual value of an item, such as the amount of ownership in a property compared to its market value. In organizational settings, equity mainly means making sure that all employees have fair access to the chances, resources, and recognition they need to grow and succeed in their careers. This method takes into account people's uniqueness and specific situations while also dealing with institutional constraints that may make it harder for people to participate or move up. Because of this, equity in the workplace is an important part of successful diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. It improves employee satisfaction, engagement, feelings of belonging, and the retention of diverse talent, while also promoting an inclusive organizational culture that sees diversity as a source of collective strength and innovation.

Workplace Policy

Policy interventions can have very different effects on different organizations. This is mostly because the structures, operational environments, and contextual variables in which these policies are made and put into action are all different. Policies are generally implemented to address recognized organizational difficulties or to foster favorable outcomes that improve institutional performance and governance. One systematic approach to discern the intended aims of a public policy is analyzing the goals specified within the legal or regulatory frameworks that create it (Kotzampasakis et al., 2024). This analytical method facilitates a more lucid comprehension of the policy's formal objectives and offers a conceptual and normative framework for evaluating its efficacy and practical implications in real-world contexts.

The implementation of workplace policies enables organizations to promote fairness and justice within the work environment, ensuring that employees are recognized, respected, and appropriately rewarded for their contributions. Such policies help establish organizational structures that support equitable treatment and transparent decision-making, which in turn can enhance employee satisfaction, strengthen commitment to organizational goals, and improve overall productivity. Moreover, an inclusive workplace culture ensures that all employees feel valued and supported, creating an atmosphere in which individuals are comfortable sharing ideas, raising concerns, and offering constructive suggestions to management. By encouraging open communication and participation, organizations foster a sense of psychological safety and belonging that contributes to both individual wellbeing and collective organizational performance. The establishment of policies in an organisation can be impactful in many ways, including, by setting clear expectations, policies help ensure that individuals within the organisation understand what is expected of them and can make informed decisions

that align with the organisation's goals and values. Policies also guide decision-making, providing a framework for making informed, consistent, and fair decisions (Klingner et al., 2010). This framework helps decision-makers consider relevant factors, weigh options, and choose a course of action that is in the best interest of the organisation. By providing a structured approach to decision-making, policies can help reduce the risk of arbitrary or biased decisions.

Furthermore, policies promote consistency, ensuring that actions and decisions align with the organization's goals, values, and objectives (Simon, 2013). Consistency is essential for building trust, credibility, and reputation, both within and outside the organisation. By establishing clear policies, organisations can ensure that their actions and decisions are consistent and predictable, which can help to build confidence and trust among stakeholders. Finally, policies can reduce risk, mitigating potential risks, conflicts, or negative consequences (COSO, 2013). By establishing clear guidelines and expectations, policies can help organisations avoid potential pitfalls and minimise the risk of adverse outcomes. This can help to protect the organisation's reputation, assets, and interests, and ensure that it is able to achieve its goals and objectives.

Features of Effective Policy

Effective policies are typically characterised by several key features. They are clear, easy to understand, and communicate, ensuring that all stakeholders can comprehend and implement them correctly (Bridges, 2017). Clear policies help prevent confusion, misinterpretation, and inconsistent application. Additionally, effective policies are consistent, applied fairly and uniformly across the organisation, which helps build trust and credibility among employees and stakeholders (Klingner et al., 2010). Consistency in policy application also ensures that decisions are made based on established guidelines rather than personal biases. Moreover, effective policies are relevant, aligning with the organisation's goals and objectives, and supporting its overall mission (Simon, 2013). This alignment ensures that policies contribute to the organisation's success and do not hinder its progress. Effective policies are reviewable and regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing circumstances, such as new laws, regulations, or organisational priorities (COSO, 2013). Regular reviews help ensure that policies remain relevant, effective, and compliant with current standards and best practices.

Forms of Policies

Policies are essential guidelines that shape an organisation's decision-making processes and behaviour. They come in various forms, including governance policies that define roles and responsibilities, operational policies that outline procedures for day-to-day activities, social responsibility

policies that promote diversity and inclusion, and risk management policies that mitigate potential risks. By developing and implementing effective policies, organisations can promote transparency, efficiency, and fairness, ultimately driving long-term success. These policies provide guidance, structure, and accountability, enabling organisations to operate efficiently, make informed decisions, and achieve their objectives while minimising risks and ensuring compliance with laws and regulations.

Strategies to Promote Equity at Work

Promoting equity in the workplace requires intentional effort and strategic planning. Effective strategies include implementing diversity mentorship programmes, employee resource groups (ERGs), diversity training, celebrating cultural holidays, promoting accessibility, examining onboarding processes, updating hiring practices, recognising unconscious bias, and promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) from the top. These strategies can help create a more inclusive work environment, level the playing field, and provide opportunities for advancement. Leadership commitment is crucial, and setting goals, tracking progress, and celebrating wins can demonstrate an organisation's commitment to DEIB. By prioritising equity and inclusion, organisations can create a culture that values and supports all employees, driving business success and employee well-being.

Some Equity Promoting Policies

Policies play a crucial role in advancing equity in the workplace by establishing frameworks that promote fairness, inclusion, and equal opportunities. Here are some key aspects of policies that contribute to workplace equity:

Anti-Discrimination Policies

Anti-discrimination policies are essential for creating a workplace culture that values diversity and promotes equity. These policies clearly define unacceptable behaviours and outline consequences for violations, ensuring a workplace free from bias and harassment. It prohibits discrimination based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or religion (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022). By establishing clear expectations for behaviour and consequences for non-compliance in organisations, anti-discrimination policies can help prevent biases and ensure that all employees are treated fairly and with respect. Effective anti-discrimination policies also provide procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of discrimination, ensuring that employees feel safe and supported in the workplace (SHRM, 2020). Research has shown that organisations with strong anti-discrimination policies tend to have higher levels of employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity (Hunt et al., 2018).

Diversity and Inclusion Policies

Diversity and inclusion policies are vital for creating a workplace culture that values and celebrates diversity, promoting employee well-being and business success. These policies encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, such as training programmes, mentorship opportunities, and employee resource groups, which help create a sense of belonging and empowerment among employees (Adeleye 2012 & Hunt et al., 2018). By valuing diverse perspectives and experiences, organisations can drive innovation and improve business performance (McKinsey, 2018). Research has shown that diversity and inclusion initiatives can lead to increased job satisfaction, retention, and business performance, making them a crucial investment for organisations (Adeleye, 2012). By providing opportunities for employees to connect, share their experiences, and develop their skills, organisations can foster a culture of inclusivity and support employee growth and development.

Family-Friendly Policies

Family-friendly policies are designed to support employees with caregiving responsibilities, such as parents, caregivers, or those with family obligations. These policies offer benefits like parental leave, flexible work arrangements, or other support to help employees balance their work and family responsibilities (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). By providing these benefits, family-friendly policies help promote equity and support employees in managing their personal and professional responsibilities. This, in turn, can lead to increased employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity (Hill et al., 2010).

Gender Equity

Policies that deal with socioeconomic issues like maternity leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work schedules can help make the workplace more fair and provide employees a sense of value (Ayaba, I. et al. 2024) (Rees et al., 2023). The research report suggests, among other things, that the government should examine and amend current laws to make sure they are in line with international standards on gender equality. It should also set up ways to keep an eye on and evaluate how well gender policies are being followed at all levels of government. (Ayaba, I. et al. 2024)

Accommodation Policies

Accommodation policies are crucial for ensuring that employees with disabilities or other needs have equal access to opportunities and resources. These policies provide reasonable accommodation, such as modifications to the physical workspace, flexible work arrangements, or assistive technologies (ADA, 1990). By providing these accommodations, organizations can ensure that employees with disabilities are able to contribute fully and participate in the workplace. Accommodation policies also promote a

culture of inclusivity and respect, where employees feel valued and supported (Schur et al., 2016).

Pay Equity Policies

Pay equity policies are essential for ensuring fair and equitable compensation practices, eliminating pay disparities based on factors like gender, race, or other protected characteristics (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017). By conducting regular pay audits, prohibiting salary history inquiries, and implementing transparent compensation practices, organisations can promote a culture of fairness and equity (Equal Pay Act, 1963). Prioritising pay equity can reduce the risk of discrimination claims, improve reputation, and promote a positive work environment (Blau & Kahn, 2017). By valuing and respecting employees, organisations can increase job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance their reputation as an equitable employer. Pay equity policies are a crucial step towards creating a workplace culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Inclusive Workplace Guidelines

Inclusive workplace guidelines promote a culture of respect and empathy, valuing employees from diverse backgrounds. These guidelines include policies on language, communication, and cultural sensitivity, ensuring all employees feel included (Thomas & Ely, 1996). By fostering an inclusive work environment, organisations can leverage diverse perspectives and experiences, driving innovation and business success (McKinsey, 2018). Research shows that inclusive workplaces have higher levels of employee engagement, creativity, and collaboration (Shore et al., 2011). Implementing diversity and inclusion policies in the workplace can address equity and fairness in complex organisations (Onyekwere, L. A. 2025). Organisations can promote inclusivity through training programmes, celebrating cultural holidays, and encouraging open dialogue and feedback, ultimately creating a workplace culture that values and supports all employees.

Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

Grievance redressal mechanisms are essential for creating a safe and supportive work environment. These mechanisms provide accessible, transparent, and effective processes for reporting and addressing discrimination complaints, ensuring that employees feel confident in reporting incidents and that issues are addressed promptly (SHRM, 2020). Research has shown that effective grievance redressal mechanisms can help prevent workplace conflicts, reduce turnover, and promote employee satisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2013). Organisations can establish multiple channels for reporting complaints, provide training for managers and employees, and ensure that investigations are thorough and impartial.

Types of Work Policies

Work policies are essential guidelines that shape the work environment, employee behaviour, and organisational culture. They include operational policies (work hours, attendance, dress code, health and safety), employee conduct policies (code of conduct, anti-harassment, disciplinary), benefits and compensation policies (pay structures, equal pay), and work-life balance policies (flexible work, parental leave, bereavement leave). Other important policies include confidentiality, social media, drug and alcohol, termination, nepotism, and remote international work policies. These policies promote fairness, ensure compliance with laws and regulations, and support employee well-being. By developing and implementing effective policies, organisations can create a positive work environment, drive business success, and minimise potential losses. Well-designed policies help organisations navigate complex regulatory landscapes, protect their assets, and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

Advancing Equity in the Workplace

Advancing equity in the workplace requires a multifaceted approach that involves intentional effort, commitment, and strategic planning. According to research, diversity and inclusion initiatives are foundational to creating an equitable workplace, and implementing diversity training programmes can help raise awareness about unconscious biases and promote understanding of different cultures and perspectives (Shore et al., 2011; Hunt et al., 2018). Reducing bias is also crucial, and organisations can implement blind hiring practices and training programmes to help employees recognise and overcome their unconscious biases (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022). Providing equal opportunities, ensuring fair compensation and benefits, and supporting employee resource groups are also essential for advancing equity (Thomas & Ely, 1996; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022; Shore et al., 2011). Leadership commitment is critical, and top-level management should demonstrate a genuine commitment to equity and inclusion (Hunt et al., 2018). Continuous monitoring and evaluation of equity metrics is also necessary to identify areas for improvement and make targeted interventions (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022). By taking a comprehensive approach to equity, organisations can create a workplace culture that values and empowers all employees.

The Role of Policy in Workplace Equity

Policy plays a multifaceted and crucial role in promoting workplace equity by addressing systemic barriers, promoting diversity and inclusion, and ensuring fairness and opportunity for all employees. Policies can mandate inclusive recruitment practices, ensure accessibility, and

protect employees from harassment and discrimination (Catalyst, 2019; SHRM, n.d.). They can also promote flexible work arrangements, mentorship and sponsorship programmes, and diversity and inclusion training (HBR, 2019). Comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies can foster a culture of inclusion, support employee resource groups, and encourage open communication and feedback. Regular equity audits and data analysis can help organisations track progress, identify gaps, and make data-driven decisions to promote workplace equity. By implementing and enforcing effective policies, organisations can create a fair and inclusive work environment where all employees can thrive.

Importance of Policy in Advancing Equity in Workplace

Equity in the workplace is crucial for fostering a culture of inclusion, respect, and fairness. According to research, implementing equity practices such as regular pay audits (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017), mentorship and sponsorship programmes (Thomas & Ely, 1996), flexible work policies (Hill et al., 2010), and inclusive recruitment and hiring practices (Kalev et al., 2006) can help promote diversity, inclusion, and fairness. Policies play a vital role in advancing equity by identifying and dismantling systemic barriers (Kram & Isabella, 1985), promoting diversity and inclusion (Hunt et al., 2018), and ensuring equal opportunities for all employees. By implementing equity practices and policies, organisations can create a positive and productive work environment that values and respects all employees, driving business success and employee well-being (Shore et al., 2011). Ultimately, equity is fundamental to creating a workplace culture that is inclusive, respectful, and fair, and policies are a key component of achieving this goal.

Best Practices for Implementation Equity Policies

Implementing equity policies effectively requires a multifaceted approach that involves several best practices. Leadership commitment is crucial, as leaders set the tone for the organisation and drive the equity agenda (Hunt et al., 2018). Employee involvement is also essential, as it ensures that policies are informed from diverse perspectives and address the needs of all employees (Shore et al., 2011). Regular monitoring and feedback are critical for tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement, and organisations can use metrics and benchmarks to assess their progress toward equity goals (Kalev et al., 2006). Inclusive decision-making is also vital, as it fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among employees and helps identify potential biases and areas for improvement (Shore et al., 2011). Providing training and education to employees on equity policies is another critical best practice, ensuring understanding and compliance (Bezrukova et al., 2016). By prioritising equity and

inclusion and implementing these best practices, organisations can create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment that supports employee well-being and success.

Benefits of Equity Policies

Implementing equity policies can have numerous benefits for organisations. By fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity, organisations can improve employee morale, boost engagement and motivation, and enhance organisational performance. When employees feel valued, respected, and supported, they are more likely to be motivated, productive, and committed to the organisation (Shore et al., 2011). Equity policies promote a sense of fairness and justice, leading to higher levels of employee engagement and job satisfaction. Organisations that prioritise equity are also more likely to attract top talent, drive innovation, and achieve better business outcomes (Hunt et al., 2018). A diverse and inclusive workplace culture fosters creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, leading to improved organisational performance and competitiveness. Additionally, proactive equity policies can reduce legal risks by minimising the risk of discrimination lawsuits and reputational damage (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022). By promoting equity and inclusion, organisations can create a work environment that is supportive, respectful, and empowering, leading to improved employee outcomes and business success.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a framework for understanding the role of policy in advancing equity in the workplace. According to SET, employees are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed when they perceive that their contributions are valued and reciprocated. Policies that promote fairness, respect, and inclusion can foster a sense of reciprocity and mutual benefit between employees and the organisation. When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate with increased engagement, motivation, and commitment. Organisations can prioritise policies such as diversity and inclusion training, flexible work arrangements, employee recognition and rewards, and fair decision-making processes to create a positive and supportive work environment. By doing so, organisations can build trust, promote perceived organisational support, and enhance employee outcomes, including job satisfaction, retention, and performance. By prioritising equity and supporting their employees' well-being and success.

Organisational Justice Theory

Organisational Justice Theory (OJT) provides a framework for understanding the role of policy in advancing equity in

the workplace. The theory highlights three key components of justice: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of decision-making processes), and interactional justice (fairness of interpersonal treatment). By promoting fairness and justice in these areas, organisations can create a positive and supportive work environment that fosters employee engagement, motivation, and commitment. Policies that promote fairness and justice can lead to positive employee outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance. To apply OJT, organisations can implement fair and transparent decision-making processes, provide equal opportunities and treatment for all employees, and foster a culture of respectful and empathetic communication. By prioritising policies that promote fairness and justice, organisations can promote a culture of justice and fairness that supports employee well-being and performance.

Conclusion

Moreover, equity policies contribute to a positive workplace culture that values diversity, promotes inclusion, and supports employee well-being (Thomas & Ely, 1996). A positive workplace culture is essential for employee satisfaction, retention, and overall well-being. By promoting equity and inclusion, organisations can create a work environment that is supportive, respectful, and empowering, leading to improved employee outcomes and business success. Equity policies can have a positive impact on employee morale, organisational performance, and legal risks. By prioritising equity and inclusion, organisations can create a more positive and productive work environment, drive business success, and reduce the risk of legal issues.

Way Forward

1. Develop an equal opportunities policy that ensures fairness and non-discrimination in all aspects of employment.
2. Implement diversity and inclusion training to educate employees about unconscious bias, discrimination, and the importance of equity.
3. Conduct regular pay audits to identify and rectify pay gaps to ensure fair compensation for all employees.
4. Foster a culture of inclusion to promote diversity in leadership positions, offer flexible work arrangements, and encourage open communication.
5. Establish a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and bullying by developing procedures for reporting incidents and consequences for discriminatory behaviour.

6. Regularly review and update policies to ensure policies remain effective and relevant, and make changes as needed.
7. Demonstrate Leadership Commitment that set the tone for the organisation's culture and priorities and hold leaders accountable for promoting equity and inclusion.

As organizations seek to strengthen equity-oriented practices, people and culture analytics platforms such as Diversio can play a significant supporting role. These platforms provide data-driven analytical tools that enable organizations to identify areas requiring improvement and systematically monitor the progress of their equity initiatives. Through the integration of technology, workforce data analysis, and expert advisory support, organizations are better equipped to understand structural gaps, evaluate policy outcomes, and make informed decisions aimed at advancing workplace fairness. Consequently, the use of such analytical systems can help organizations manage the complexities associated with implementing equity-focused strategies while fostering measurable and sustainable organizational change.

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