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Diversity or Individual Differences. The Gap and the Overlap in Thoughts

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Abstract

The central questions, being asked in the paper are: what is new in an old idea? Or what is new in an old wine even in a new bottle? What is current or germane in diversity study? Can more or less be achieved focusing on individual difference studies as a purer concern of the social science? Diversity and individual differences seems to connote the same meaning. It could be likened to the farmer practicing shifting cultivation and crop rotation which are both concepts /methods of farming but different in practice. The paper is built around a framework exploiting the meaning of and origin of studies in individual difference and diversity and it was shown that diversity study as well as such recent conceptions as performance appraisal or talent management or performance management are hardly new conception but only new preoccupations. Modern social scientists are in the paper viewed as idea farmers practicing a semblance of shifting cultivation rather than crop rotation thereby leaving a frontier of knowledge not thoroughly expanded before the soil is left to fallow. Of what use is the fallowing period? Do the land recover nutrient or the soil is washed off by erosion of time and lack of focus? Or is there a tendency or possibility of under exploitation of the natural reserve of a forest under shifting cultivation compared to the crop rotational practice? Could it be the case that old fields become drudgery once it continued to be cultivated continuously? Copious search of literature on diversity and individual differences underscored the similarity of the two concepts. Viewed against the object of science and scholarship, not much may be achieved if the current trend of rehashing, renaming, or reloading old concepts and presenting them as new is sustained. An approach in which the farm is wholesomely cultivated, perhaps extracted, until what other resource lying beneath the surface is accessed is therefore advocated.

Keywords: Management Sciences, Knowledge

Introduction

In the field of social/management sciences, as well other disciplines, the search for new metaphor as anchorage to 'new' ideas had continued unabated. It is not likely that any scientist or scholar worth his/her onus will heed the time worn warning; what else is new under the sun? As

much as the bell tolls ideas from past will continue to be recycled, rehearsed or presented as in a relay race where old idea hands the baton to a new, more rigorous idea.

I believe strongly in advancement in knowledge and in the fact that a freshness of breathe and new perspectives is needed to expand new frontiers of knowledge. Knowledge, like science is for the benefit of mankind as long as new findings solve old problems and throw light on the future path(s) to follow. Over the centuries there appear to be no demurrage of ideas to the extent that old, well worn areas of preoccupation rises from the earth from which they are thought to be buried. At best social scientists have behaved like the farmer using the shifting cultivation approach; old farm lands are left to fallow and then a new vigor, energy and seed is sown such that the farm blooms all over again - of course not without new profit for the new farmer.

If the object of Art is to verbalize what remains unexpressed (Skvorecky, 1984) in the human mind, the object of science is to solve problems; common or complex.

Recently we engaged a budding scholar who excitedly boasts of his findings in the 'new' area of knowledge (perhaps preoccupation) called *performance management*. What fundamental difference is there among performance appraisal or talent management or performance management? "Are these mere engagements in metaphor shifts or are there sincere shift in conception?" I asked. Recently as the steam generated by the gender studies vaporizes, literature has been inundated with several new conceptions such as *diversity, diversity management, knowledge worker, knowledge management, decent work, talent management* etc.

Some of these issues are nascent as some are geriatric; soon some die, others live longer in the dictum as well as in the discourse.

Also recently, I listened to the inaugural lecture of an erudite professor titled *people: diversity for the purpose of mankind* and not haven slept a day over the lecture, a question cropped up in my mind, is diversity the same as individual differences? Listening to the professor, there is no pretence to the connection among the social/management sciences and the sciences. Indeed the spiritual appear to have become somehow capable of scientific vocalization, if not empirical justification. Certain conceptions or metaphors like *intelligence quotient, emotional quotient* and *spiritual quotient* were juxtaposed almost as if they find space for similar rigor of scientific analysis. Such confluence among far-flung ideas may be the future of science especially as the human mind evolves to capture the fourth dimension of thoughts. The present paper is focused on the trend of niche carving especially in the social/management sciences.

The central question asked is what is new in an old idea? What is new in an old wine even in a new bottle? What is current or germane in diversity study? Can more or less be achieved focusing on individual difference studies as a primer concern of the social sciences? Or is there a tendency or possibility of under exploitation of the natural reserve of a forest under shifting cultivation compared to the crop rotational practice where the soil nutrient is more effectively tapped? Could it be the case that old fields become drudgery once it continued to be cultivated continuously?

Conceptual Clarifications

Meaning of Individual Differences

Individual differences refer according to Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2001) variation in characteristics or developmental outcomes between one child and another. People are not the same in many respects (Eze, 2004). Several traits or characteristics distinguished mankind from one another into what may be called heterogeneity of traits.

Perhaps the most that man share in common is similarity in specie whereby we are of the genre homosapiens, belonging to the mammalian kingdom. Beyond the symmetrical endo-skeletal structure, cranial bones and a brain of a billion nerves and neurons, bipedal locomotion and language ability, the rest is differentiation, leading to diverse permutation of attitudes, styles and so forth. The terms variation, differentiation, heterogeneity have been read to describe the widespread assortment of life and phenomena of experience existing in our diverse planet; the earth.

One may not conjecture that these descriptions have passed on their meanings to current usages as *diversity*; it will appear that the expression diversity has assumed a larger construct in the mind of scholars such that it may be applied in several spheres of life in coinages like biodiversity, social diversity, ethnic diversity, geo diversity, gender diversity, and so forth.

Meaning of Diversity

Diversity as a concept become popular and gained increased attentions since early 1990s. The idea was perceived by the equal opportunities philosophy which was reflected in the equal opportunity legislation in the UK. Diversity goes a step further than equal opportunity because it seeks to create a climate that makes achievement of statistical goal only means to an end. Diversity reflects valuing of individual (and group) differences and recognition of the benefits of multiculturalism of talents, skills, perceptions, views thereby challenging narrow confines of stereotypical opinions and traditional assumptions. The basic premise of equal opportunity is that people should be treated equally, regardless of difference, while diversity is the recognition of differences; valuing and harnessing them for organizational and societal good, Idowu (2008).

Diversity ordinarily means differences. Kreitner and Kiniki (2001) views diversity as representing the multitude of *individual differences* and *similarities* that exist between or among all people. In reality, diversity scholars appear to emphasize factors of differences than similarities. In general, diversity is viewed as differences between people, for example in race, age, gender, disability, geographic origin, family status, education, or personality that can affect work *relationship* and *achievement* (Business: Ultimate Resource, 2002). Diversity has also been viewed as nothing more than conflict between management and the work force (Balogun, 2002). However extended this view may be, it qualifies the emphasis on difference earlier noted above. Diversity can therefore be viewed from psychological, social, ethnic, gender cultural and several other perspectives. It is about:

1. Social inclusiveness
2. Social justice, and
3. Equal opportunity.

Viewed from psychological perspective, diversity is about individual identity, while sociological view focuses on group or social identity; that is, social categorization. It can also focus on similarity-attraction and differentiation; the push-pull factors existing in every human association.

Individual diff Erence and Diversity Studies Compared

Francis Galton (1822 – 1911) was puzzled by his ability to achieved academic brilliance and concluded that he probably lacked the ability. Abandoning academic career, he achieved prominence as an explorer and geographer by studying ethnic diversity in psychological characteristics. His second cousin Charles Darwin (1959) published the ground breaking took “on the origin of species”. According to Galton physical as well as psychological and moral character, capable of evolving were not only inheritable but separated individuals from one another into categories in terms of adaptive

features for survival. Superior ability, he believed, could be passed down from one generation to another. He advocated *eugenics* as an attempt to improve the human species through selective breeding. He developed tests to predict eminence in later life using measures of reaction time, sensory activity physical energy, and head size. His tests and assumptions formed the basis the basis of the study of individual difference. The fully fledged field of psychometrics has farmed this field for close to a century and advances have continued to be made. Beyond cognitive differences, most psychologists today agree to individual differences, in vast areas of human attributes ranging from intellectual, emotional, biological, personality and several other dimensions. Real work on individual differences was pioneered by the French psychologists Binet and Simon (1905), the German psychologist Stern (1912) and the American Terman (1916), these became prominent working on intelligence as a core factor in individual differences.

The field was further broadened by Adler (1956) and his individual psychology. Several areas of individual differences have been acknowledged in literature; cognitive, emotional, psychomotor, attitudes, and perception. Much was achieved through psychometry, a field devoted to measurement of individual differences.

Indeed individual differences study is precursor to diversity studies and the ideas captured by the two concepts are similar to certain extent. Historically the study of individual differences continued unabated and diversity study may have bestridden or overlapped efforts in the study of the earlier.

While diversity study only emphasizes that individual differences be recognized, valued and harnessed scholars in the field, as in other area of social studies, have pursued the undertaking as if diversity is a totally new conception different in content and ramifications. Diversity ordinarily is made up of differences especially as related to human attributes; simple or complex. There are several areas of individual differences as the table (slightly adapted) by Eze (2005) will show.

Table1. Areas of Individual Differences contributing variables/attributes

1	Mind	Set, Sight, Mentality, mood, Psyche, Soul Spirit Conscience, consciousness, Life
2	Intelligence	IQ, Abilities, ideas, KSAs, Capabilities, Problem solving
3	Cognitions	Thinking, Reasoning, Perception, Imagery, Remembering
4.	Self	Structures and Functions, Id, Ego Superego, Identities, Destiny
5.	Self awareness	Components, Questions, Qualities, Virtues
6.	Other-Awareness	Human Relations, Human Worth, Human Relationships, Human Right
7.	Personality	Traits, Character, Types, Styles, Normally
8.	Behaviour	Conduct, Manners, Habits Performance, Productivity, Actions and Reaction
9.	Memory	Processes, Learning, Retention, Remembering Language
10.	Emotion	Feelings, Attitudes, Controls, Passions, Sentiments, Tempers
11.	Motivations	Goal-settings, Goals, Objectives, needs Wants, Aspirations, Targets, Life-plans, Tendencies, Achievements, Ambition.
12.	Sensation	Processes, Receptor, Reaction , Perception the tenses
13.	Perception	The Sense, selection, schemas, set stimuli attentions, interpretation , style.
14.	Insight (intuition)	Planning, Decision Making, Problem solving forecasting prediction.

Source: Eze (2005)

Equally diversity can be said to exist on several dimensions or in several areas of life as the below table will show.

Table 2. Diversity Issues

1.	Intrapersonal (Personality)	Living being, conscious/unconscious processes, IQ, KSAs, creativity, problem solving, perceptions, emotions, memory, thought processes, EI, talents, physical ability
2.	People	Race, colour, culture, social status (wooden/silver spoon), heritage, age, sex, height, physique, sightedness, language, life experiences, beliefs, value system and sexual preferences
3.	Gender	Degree of masculinity/femininity
4.	Age (Demography)	Children(non working/working), Adult(unemployed/employed), Old (retired and tired/retired and not tired)
5.	Disability	Sight, limb/mental/emotional/medical disability
6.	Geographic origin	North, South, South West, East, South-South, Middle Belt, North Central etc
7.	Education	1. Formal: Primary, Secondary, NCE, ND, HND, B.Sc, B.ED, M.Sc, PGD PhD. 2. Professional : ACCA, CIPMMN, NIM etc
8.	Generation	Old school, Baby bloomer, generation X, millennium children (Fajana, 2009)
9.	Sectoral	Formal/ informal, civil/public service, private or commercial sector
10.	Organizational	Functions/structure, processes, buss strategy, culture, climate.
11.	Industrial	Oil, Banking, Education, Textile , Automobile, Extractive, etc
12.	Cultural	Social versus western, diffusion, religious constellations (Christianity, Islam, Traditional, Exoteric)
13.	Technical (professional)	Bankers, Journalist, Farmers Engineer, Teacher etc
14.	Performance outcomes	Efficient/Effective, High Flyers, slow but steady, Indolent

Source: Adapted from Fajana (2009)

Indeed differences and or diversity exist in diverse areas of life depending on the issue or agent that is receiving consideration.

The Gaps and the Overlaps

It is noticeable that tables 1 and 2 have similarities in the sense of both dealing with human related attributes, especially points of distinction between one person and another.

The psychological understanding of the person according to Eze (2004) is within the context of individual (I factor) attributes and environmental attributes (E factor). Their interplay (called interplay of I and E) produces unique situational variables leaving equally unique influence on the individual, the organization and whatever other contexts of behaviour.

The gaps

How different therefore is diversity from individual difference? Most studies on diversity have focused on how group differences produces different outcomes either at work or in the larger society (Kochan, et al 2002; Babawale, 2004; Lawrence and Nelarine, 2001, Idowu, 2008), others simply draw attention to what constitutes diversity issues (Fajana, 2009), while others sought rationale for diversity studies (Holbeche, 2003).

Between the study of individual differences and the advent of diversity studies there appear little hiatus, if at all, of researched efforts in the earlier field. Like in several areas of 'new' research activities, it will appear reasonable to wonder how much new grounds are being broken in the new search for concepts and constructs. Two examples will suffice:

(1) Jayeoba (2007) had traced the evolution and change of concepts and shift of paradigm in the nomenclature used to describe the now field of human resources management. The *slave* started to represent the idea of work (physical work, never paid for). The *labourer* is paid but seeing mainly as capable of use of *brawn* and *no brain*. When radical actions began to be taken to resist underhand/exploitative use of human efforts *labour* was substituted as a more befitting title for the worker. Recently the metaphors have shifted from *human capital* to *human resource* and the latest *knowledge workers*.

The conceptual shifts have not been mere shifts but an evolution of thoughts and conception of man in the work place leading to greater understanding, appreciation/reward of the human person at work.

(2) Psychology as a field focused on measurement of human attributes. The vehicle for the growth and maturity of this field is the measurement of intelligence and of course several other personalities attributes like personality, interest and aptitudes. Not only are there different tests, suited to several attributes, new frontiers and conceptions have taken place, yet the field continued to be cultivated (Gardner (1983) in "Frames of mind" made outstanding contribution in his theory of multiple intelligence. The fallout of painstaking concentration on the core concept of individual differences later yield the new concept of *emotional intelligence* (EI), by Salvey and Mayer (1990), which has continued to provoke vigorous reactions and research. For once the weak correlation between Crystalline intelligence and performance indices like productivity, leadership, job satisfaction are being seen to be stronger when E. I is correlated. The skipping or leap into the study of diversity issues as a distinct preoccupation may have created a gap in or of knowledge.

The overlaps in thoughts

There is considerable overlap in the concept of diversity and individual differences. While individual difference touch on factors within the individual (the I factor) diversity deals on how individual factors relates with environmental factors (the E factor). On the other hand, the study of individual differences was perhaps narrowly focused by psychologists on the primary person; that is the individual as an agent, active and reactive though, but different on the bases of several unique attributes. To the extent that intrapersonal behavioural dynamics are only enacted within environmental contexts - usually social context - individual differences also have social (group) dimension which diversity study appear to emphasize.

Also, it will appear that when scholarly hands are stretched wide, several disciplines can connect on the study of diversity; the psychologist and sociologists much so. To this extent, the conceptual overlap between diversity and individual extend to interdisciplinary overlap.

What produces difference or diversity?

Individual differences are produced by differences in people's heredity. Genes are a stretch of deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA that produces a specific protein (also enzymes) which in turn forms building blocks of our bodies including the brain, or drives the processes that allow us to live (Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2001). Genes affect us from the instant of conception and are in turn affected by the surrounding (nutritional, emotional) environment at every phase of our lives. Genes affect obvious traits like eye colour, height, complexion, and also behaviour. For instance, current estimates are that about 50 percent of the individual variability in IQ scores is due to genetic factors (Wortman, Loftus and Weaver, 1999). This leaves an equally large influence from the environment. Environmental influence can be further separated into two:

(1) Shared environmental influence, which relates to the home environment

(2) Environmental factors relating to unique experiences. That is, non-shared environmental influences (ENs).

The gene and the environment interact in ways that bring about intricate differences in individuals and group of individuals. It is critical to note that *the genes cannot programme the structure of the brain entirely in advance*. For instance, your brain contains far more connections at birth than it does now. As one interacts with the environment, certain neural connections used over and over again and these survive, while others that are not useful are *pruned* away (Cowan et al., 1984). Pruning is only one of the many ways by which the brain changes as one experiences the world. The old argument between nature and nurture which appear to occur here is not typical of the egg and chicken paradox; the question is not which of gene and environment predates each other or which has pre-eminent influence over the other. The genes can affect the environment just as the environment can regulate the genes. The genes and the environment have been shown as different aspects of a single system (Gottlieb, 1998). Both genes and environment are important especially as they jointly interact to produce similarities as well as differences noticed in people. Indeed, ethnic, cultural, and other differences earlier noted can be traced to the interplay between I and E.

According to researchers in behavioural genetics, interaction between the gene and the environment occurs in the following ways:

(1) Passive interaction. This occurs when parents' or sibling's genetically shaped tendencies produces an environment that is passively received by the child. Parents with higher intelligence tend to give birth to children with higher intelligence. Such parents are likely educated with books in the house. For such a child books in the house is given, not something of grave concern. Just like for most African society, resources are given, no wonder there is no active search to discover or develop what is commonly available.

(2) Evocative (reactive) interaction. Evocative interaction occurs when genetically influenced characteristics draw out behaviour from other people. Most African scholars, unfortunately only react - via imitation (sometimes outright plagiarism) of western models. A sort of aping or "tokunbo" intellectualism

(3) Active interaction. This involves constructing situations or shaping and modifying the environment through deliberate choices. That is, either putting themselves in specific situation or avoiding uncomfortable settings. In active interacting both the agent and the environment is shaped and the dynamic and scope/domain of interaction continued to expand. New expressions are formed for new phenomenon and the base of knowledge is expanded and consolidated.

The Scholar as Farmer

Geographers have noted that of the habitable component of our planet earth only a small percentage has been built up and a vast arable lands exist everywhere, as huge and virgin forest, grass savannah and desert waiting in vain for man to cultivate; its natural endowments yet untapped. Similarly the world of concepts and ideas are vast. The human languages have only captured a few of the latent ideas. Psychology alone has given birth to over 50 subfields (Eze, 2005) and the countdown continues. Similar trend can be noticed in several other disciplines. A case of many farmstead limited farming. As disciplines proliferate, so are areas of research concerns and a preponderance of conceptions and constructs that add little to knowledge. In the process, the scholar is more like a shifting cultivator, leaving the land to fallow and coming back to the farm after an interregnum. During the fallow of course one expects new crops, new farming system or a hybridization of hoe, seed and efforts. Unfortunately, shifting cultivation is old, traditional and limited in scope of crop unlike its modern farming variant, crop rotation, which allows for time to exhaust the providence of the soil with minimal loss of nutrients, energy and focus.

At the 40th annual conference of the chartered institute of personnel management of Nigeria (CIPMN) speakers on *performance management* labored to distinguish between the concept and performance appraisal. All that was evident was differential approach rather than differential conception. The knowledge worker has also been presented as a modern variant of worker in the HRM conceptions. Only that from time immemorial human effort can only exist as basically mental and physical.

New Knowledge or New Preoccupation?

Are proliferation of concepts and constructs yielding newer understanding and newer solution, or are we merely looking for areas of engagement? The truth lie somewhere, between a search for new knowledge and or solution, and a search for new preoccupations. In many instances, preoccupation only mean keeping busy, keep writing, publish or perish, or at least a system of niche carving. If new knowledge confers the status of pioneers in a field, like Gardner (1984) in putting emotional intelligence to the front burner, much is achieved. Otherwise, we chase the shadow; we waste our collective efforts and certainly resources!

Research motivation may be:

1. To seek urgent solution to pressing problems like cure of HIV/AIDS or tackle the underlining course of higher prevalence in coronary diseases.
2. To fulfill a curious urge for knowledge; which does often lead to a *aha!* experience; the birth of a genius.
3. As dictated by fund providers. The need, and intended solution is dictated by fund providers.
4. As dictated by supervisors; sometimes to further the research interest of would be supervisor or simply to keep the students off your back.
5. To replicate ideas from other ends or climes; a common pre-occupation of African scholars.
6. The need to publish; pressing need for those in the teaching profession at the tertiary level.

While 1 – 2 is ruled by the object of science, which is to seek and find solution and beat forward the frontiers of knowledge, 3-6 may be mere expression of our survival instinct; mere preoccupation with constructs and stomach induced operant behaviour; that is, mere pre-occupation with constructs and concepts without genuine concern for problems or for solution.

Conclusions

Individualism as a cultural characteristics that favours the achievement of individual over group goals and which is characteristic of many western nations is perhaps not a modern variant of the study of individual differences, but there may be a baton exchange between theory and practice in the two conceptions. Just like dialectical materialism gave birth, at both extremes, to capitalism and communism, insidious conceptions in the mind of scientist can take a nature of its own; breeding life or death in the larger nexus of human interaction.

No attack on diversity as an issue or at diversity experts/scholars is intended. The paper is only a wake-up call at what is needful. Without caution, the modern scholar may sow an entire academic career into an effort that on accountability day, when compiling his/her inaugural (if providence allows), little may have been achieved in terms of real solution to his immediate environment.

Our engrossment with often nebulous conceptions as were highlighted in this paper should go beyond mere face value. Nigeria is diverse in several ways and so what? Is diversity a major problem of underdevelopment, especially in Nigeria? Many will say yes who will likely say no to another questions *is Nigeria one of the most diverse cultures in the world?* The current preoccupation with rehashing, reloading and repackaging of old ideas, recalled obviously from foreign literature, to gain currency or flow with the tides may not bring much solution to pressing local problems of unemployment, violence and insecurity, corruption, dysfunctional social, organizational and governmental structures, disconnected leadership and docile followership.

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