The Harem and Family in Organisations

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ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to investigate the harem and family concept in organisations. The study used archival data to look at the harem and family concept in organisations. The study analysed the academic profiles of 13 universities in South Africa. The study looked at ethnic or racial characteristics of university departments, similarity of qualifications among lecturers, source of lecturers' qualifications, similarity of heads of departments' qualifications to lecturers' qualifications and source of heads of departments' qualifications. The study analysed the data qualitatively. The results indicated that the harem and family concept in university departments was characterised by group homogeneity in terms of racial mix, qualifications among academics, source of academics' qualifications, heads of departments' qualifications and source of heads of departments' qualifications. Future studies on the harem and family concept in organisations could focus on resource allocation practice and organisational transparency.

INTRODUCTION

A harem is a group of animals that form a family (Mellinger 2010). The group is stable and strives to be intact. The group is organised and there is implied role-taking. Members of the group are aware of what is expected of them. Even in insect colonies, there is division of labour. There are workers and soldiers. Animal and human groups respect hierarchy. There are respected older members of the group with distinct privileges. In a harem, there are older and dominating female and male members (Qi et al. 2010). These are dominant males and females such as older bulls and cows. The role of young adult males and females is subservient to that of the older members of the animal harem. Just like in a human family, the young ones are protected by older members of the family. They are put in the middle in case of an attack by predators such as hyenas and lions. By natural selection, there are bulls and cows that have an oversight role for the entire harem. In some species, there are dominant males and females in a harem. The leader of the harem looks for new pastures, relocates the group and responds to danger-warning signals in the environment (Skov et al. 2010). The leader is expected to be instinctive and works for the survival of the harem. A harem with a weak leader is usually disbanded and new groups with a vision for the survival of the species emerge. Survival of the group is dependent on the leader and collective effort in the group. In this study, the image of the harem was likened to that of the family in organisations. Organisations work as a family unit in order to survive internal and external threats to their existence.

The Harem and Family in Ethnic Groups

The concept of harem and family in organisations could be evident in ethnic groupings. People of one ethnic group are more attracted to one another and would like to speak their language and practise their culture (Yogeenswaran et al. 2010). Animals in a harem move together, play together and look for members of their own kind in the larger group of animals (Qi et al. 2010). This serves an evolutionary function: the promotion of own species (Gilbert 2011). They cater for the interests of their members. In an organisational setting, ethnic groups are identified by traditional dressing, use of ethnic language when speaking to members of the ethnic group and not the official language of business at work (Song 2011). The ethnic language reinforces group identity in multicultural organisations. Members of the ethnic group will have symbols, songs, or tell stories about home, successes and failures of their own people in the workplace (Drew 2011). The ethnic group as a harem and family will gather in designated places at agreed upon times in the organisation to reinforce ethnic integrity and to apprise the group of any threats to its members. The membership to an ethnic group is not endorsed or expressed in writing; it comes by default. The individual does not choose ethnic membership but naturally

belongs to an ethnic or racial group. At birth, the young one falls into a harem. The harem and family in organisations identifies members by totem, racial grouping, regional grouping, ethnic marks and language. In an organisational setting, employees at all levels including management can be put into ethnic categories although it is bad managerial practice to identify with ethnic, racial or regional groupings in the workplace (Malesevic 2011). Some registered ethnic or cultural groups in the workplace patronise senior management and powerful people in society. They strategise ways of dominating and outdoing competitor groups (Gilbet 2011). The ethnic group that attracts stronger members of society in the workplace becomes a stronger harem and family that will ultimately influence promotion prospects and the allocation of resources in the organisation (Napal 2006). The harem and family in organisations could become impenetrable like an animal harem. Outsiders can be excluded from organisational decision-making processes deliberately and through subtle manipulations of organisational policies and procedures (Gilbert 2011).

The Harem and Family in Organisational Competitiveness

The animal harem seeks to compete with other harems in search of opportunities, territory and safer foraging zones (Smith 2011). The harem can demarcate territory using distinct marks such as fur, dung, urine, scent, footmarks, and the physical defence of the territory (Smith 2011). The harem and family concept as applied to human groups contends that groups will sharpen their skills to gain a competitive advantage against opponents and competitors. The harem and family in an organisation can be made up of a group that seeks to promote personal, or ethnic interests, acquired skills, and achieved or ascribed status. The group holds their leader in high esteem and members are loyal to the leader (Ahlquist and Levi 2011). There is group affect between the leader and the members (Alquist and Levi 2011). In return for loyalty, the leader promotes skills among members of the harem and family to remain competitive (Sardana and Sinha 2011). In an animal harem, young males and females are taught survival skills such as hunting, fighting, flight and mating (Hogan et al. 2011). In the harem and family, the leader promotes

educational and life skills of members (Sardana and Sinha 2011). Members get sponsored to attend important conferences and training workshops and to attain higher educational qualifications that will be useful to the advancement of the harem and family. There is preferential treatment of members of the harem and family over other groups in the organisation. Organisational leaders promote talent among younger employees but the selection of employees to benefit from the organisational facility largely depends on the leader's choice (Katrinli et al. 2011). The weak and unproductive members of the harem and family are propped up, overprotected and cushioned with benefits. In an animal harem, the weak, injured and young ones are put in the middle and the harem territory is fenced by the herd (Smith 2011). The action of the leader in support of the harem and family could violate corporate governance and transparency in organisations (Nurunnabi et al. 2011). The promotion of members of the harem and family usually comes with an elaborate motivation to justify the leader's action with members of the harem and family endorsing and influencing outsiders to approve of the leader's actions. The leader's followers influence events in organisations and the leader enlarges the territorial influence of the harem and the family in an organisation (Subasic et al. 2011).

The Harem and Family in Organisational Protection

The harem and family will seek to preserve the status quo and group interests that protect its members. It protects and cherishes the traditions, history, norms and values of the group. Senior members of the harem and family reflect with nostalgia past achievements and struggles. The older members of the group impress upon younger members to uphold the secret behind the survival of the group over time. The young will be expected to learn from the experiences of senior members of the group, thus the tradition is passed on (Wettenhall 2011). Although animal harems can adapt to new environments with time, the harem generally sticks to animal survival behaviours that are peculiar to the species (Davis et al. 2005). If a harem behaves like any other animal group, it might lose its identity and perish. There is resistance to change in animal harems although severe environmental deg-

radation by human action has caused animals to migrate (Jeltsch et al. 2011). The harem and family can resist change for various reasons. Change can result in loss of privileges and lifestyle (Goransson and Brundenius 2011). The tradition of the group could be lost and organisational standards could be lowered or diluted (Von Groddeck 2011). The harem and family could perceive itself as the custodian of organisational standards. Organisational change initiated outside the harem and family could be regarded as a threat to the group' s existence in the organisation. The harem and family would need a visionary leader to protect the group from extinction. This involves activism, lobbying, and litigation against new legislation and organisational policies (Lux et al. 2011). Organisational innovation might be treated with scepticism unless the harem and family is actively involved or initiates the organisational change (Lux et al. 2011). As part of corporate social responsibility, organisations could hire sons and daughters and relatives of members of the harem and family when their parents retire. The harem and family in organisations could influence reward and compensation systems, the award of tenders and business partnerships in organisations (Graafland and van Liedekerke 2011).

The emergence of the harem and family in organisations could be associated with government legislation, affirmative action, and family-run businesses (Maharaj et al. 2011). In some countries, labour legislation could prevent or discourage certain citizens who are implied to be foreigners from occupying strategic positions in organisations (Kim 2011). Affirmative action and employment equity policies could result in some departments being occupied by people with similar backgrounds. Family-owned corporations usually employ family members and close relatives (Hu and Schaufeli 2011).

Aim of the Study

The study sought to investigate the occurrence of the harem and family in organisations. It sought to analyse characteristics of the harem and family in organisations.

Research Question

Are there characteristics of the harem and family in university departments?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Design

The study used archival data found on university websites and prospectuses that showed organisational profiles of employees. This approach was used because it is non-intrusive.

Organisational Sampling

The study focused on South African universities with accessible websites and prospectuses. The selected universities posted information on the internet and some had television and radio commercial broadcasts. Some advertised in diaries of stationery companies. The sampling was purposive in that there was a specific criterion that was used to identify the universities. The universities that were included in the study displayed employees' profiles. The study expected the universities to employ academics from various universities and research organisations in order to have diversity of skills and experience in their departments. The study identified 13 universities in South Africa that had departments which met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

Procedure

The study looked at organisational hierarchy in departments and the profiles of employees. The study examined the racial composition of academic staff, qualifications of academics and the universities where they obtained their qualifications. The study looked at the qualifications of heads of departments and the universities where they obtained their qualifications. The faculty of humanities was selected for the purpose of this study because most of the Universities in South Africa have a faculty that deals with human and social issues.

Data Analysis

The study analysed the data qualitatively. It identified common characteristics of the harem and family in organisations and put them in categories. The criteria were racial composition of the departments, similarity of qualifications among academic staff, source of qualifications, the head of department' s qualifications and where the head of department obtained their qualifications.

RESULTS

The results were analysed using the five criteria that formed the themes upon which the results were discussed. The themes were: racial composition of the departments, similarity of qualifications among academic staff, source of qualifications, head of department' s qualifications and where the head of department obtained their qualifications. The findings are described below.

Ethnic or Racial Composition of Departments

The survey showed that 10% of academic staff consisted of Africans in the departments of the 13 universities. The other 90% was largely made up of Whites and a small percentage consisted of Indians and the Chinese. Indians and Chinese are categorised as "Black people" in South Africa. The demographic representation of racial groups in university departments showed that White lecturers were the majority and African lecturers were the minority in South African universities although Africans constitute the majority of the population of South Africa.

Similarity of Qualifications among Academic Staff

The information gathered indicated that lecturing staff in departments had qualifications that were almost similar. This was calculated at about 80% similarity. The results indicated that departments hired lecturers whose skills matched the requirements of the content taught in departments. However, there were instances in which lecturers showed diverse qualifications, but these were few.

Source of Qualifications of Academic Staff

The results showed that 65% of lecturers in the universities surveyed obtained their qualifications from the universities they were teaching. The lecturers' profiles indicated qualifications that were either obtained at undergraduate or postgraduate studies in the department. Most of them got their Master's degrees and Doctorates from the departments in which they were teaching.

Head of Department's Qualifications

The results showed that most of the Heads of Departments' qualifications were similar to the qualifications of other academics in the department. This was calculated at 90% similarity. The similarity of qualifications meant that the leaders understood what their colleagues were teaching. Some of the heads of departments' had profiles which showed that they rose through the ranks until they assumed leadership roles in the department.

Source of Head of Department's Qualifications

Most of the Heads of Departments studied at the universities they were leading. The results showed that 80% of Heads of Departments obtained their qualifications from the university departments they were heading. The results indicated that leaders of university departments were attached to university departments by history. There was continuity of attachment to the department where qualifications were obtained among lecturers and Heads of Departments. Academics preferred to work in university departments where they obtained their degrees. Some of the profiles showed that the leaders and academics in the departments went away for a while after completing their degrees but returned sooner or later to work in department that nurtured them as students, academics and leaders.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that the concept of the harem and family existed in universities. The behaviour of humans in organisations can resemble that of the animal harem in many respects. In this study, employees in organisations showed behaviours of the harem and family with respect to ethnic or racial composition of the work group, similarity of qualifications among academics, source of qualifications, Heads of Departments' qualifications and source of Heads of Departments' qualifications.

The racial composition of university departments reflected a deep-rooted transformational problem that South African organisations are currently grappling with (Goransson and Brundenius 2011). The South African society is going through transformation that is facilitated

by legislation such as Employment Equity Act, Labour Relations Act, and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Government Gazette Notice 17, 2010). These laws are regularly amended due to ever-increasing challenges relating to resistance to transformation and implementation of affirmative action policies in South African organisations, including universities (Maharaj et al. 2011). The laws empower previously disadvantaged groups such as Africans, Indians, Coloureds, women of all races and people with disabilities. While labour legislation seeks to reduce inequality and promote social justice in the workplace, its implementation threatens the legitimacy of privileges that came with apartheid. This study showed that universities that were formerly designated for Whites had a large proportion of White academics in their departments. On the other hand, labour laws do not seem to encourage universities that were previously segregated on the basis of race such as universities for Africans, Indians and Coloureds to employ White South African academics and international scholars drawn from overseas universities. The demographic profiles of academics in university departments showed that departments were still dominated by academics of the race for which the university was built during apartheid (Maharaj et al. 2011). Racial integration, which was not adequately addressed by universities in this study, has the benefit of broadening diversity of thought and intellectual competition among students and academics. Innovation, organisational reform and racial mix of students and academics stimulate the intellectual exchange of ideas that is fundamental to the development of world-class universities (Wettenhall 2011). In group processes, it is argued that heterogeneous work groups are more effective than homogenous groups (Vala et al. 2011).

Similarity of qualifications among academics represents group selection processes. Members select individuals with characteristics that match members of the group (Gilbert 2011). In a harem, group attractiveness is reinforced by similarity of attributes among members. Animals that oppose the group, will stray, or wander off to find a new harem and territory (Smith 2011). In this study, the harem and family concept was confirmed by the homogenous nature of academics' qualifications and what they taught. The similarity of qualifications meant that academics in a department, as a homogenous group, could collaborate and function smoothly. Like a harem and family, they could relieve each other in case of illness or leave (Hogan et al. 2011). There would be no need to hire outsiders with novel or new skills to replace an academic in a department. The similarity of qualifications among academics could result in prejudice against the content of degrees offered by other universities. Members of an academic department could, as a harem and family, consider their academic offering as superior to what other universities teach. The harem and family in a department could align the course content or what is taught in the department to match their qualifications (Song 2011). Consequently, the university will suffer from lack of innovation and variety thus dampening public interest in the university (Subasic et al. 2011).

The profiles of academics showed that most of them obtained their degrees from the universities they were teaching. The harem and family concept is evident when the university prefers to hire former students and ignore outsiders with better qualifications. Most of the lecturers in this study showed profiles that indicated that they were taught by lecturers who were still teaching in the same department. If a university department has more than half of its staff complement made up of former students, it can then be observed that the group is functioning as a harem and family. The former students as members of the university alumni will seek to protect the legacy of their department (Hogan et al. 2011). They compare standards when they were students against what is currently happening in the department. Animal harems respond to changing environments (Davis et al. 2005). Nostalgia and over-identification with the department could result in the harem and family victimising new members to the department (Nurunnabi et al. 2011). They could set their own additional standards apart from what the organisation expects in order to restore perceived past glory (Wettenhall 2011). In keeping with continuous improvement processes in organisations, it could be observed that organisations that remain rigid and conservative tend to lag behind in productivity and organisational creativity (von Groddeck 2011). The fact that most of the academics in this study obtained their qualifications from the departments in which they were teaching could retard transformation and diversity promotion initiatives in South African universities (Maharaj 2011).

The results showed that Heads of Departments had qualifications that were similar to that of lecturers teaching in the departments. In a harem and family, resemblance of credentials between followers and the leader increases group loyalty to the leader (Ahlquist and Levi 2011). Younger members and senior members of the harem and family could consult the leader with confidence as the leader would be considered to be more knowledgeable (Sardana and Sinha 2011). If a leader knows the work subordinates are doing, there are greater chances that group compliance would be more noticeable among followers (Hogan et al. 2011). In this study, leaders seemed to have reinforced the harem and family by promoting the employment of members with qualifications that were similar to theirs (Katrinli et al. 2011).

Most of the leaders in this study obtained their qualifications from the departments they were heading. In group processes, this shows adherence to and affect for the harem and family. According to group dynamics, the harem and family can reject a leader with credentials or work experience that is not associated with the organisation. Some of the departmental leaders in this study left for a while to further their education but retuned to the harem and family for permanent employment. The department was like a sanctuary or a nest that nourished the leaders (Davis et al. 2005). In this study, Heads of Departments' profiles showed that they provided mentorship to junior members of staff. Like elders, they groomed and protected young lecturers who were beginning their academic careers. The profiles of senior members in the department acted as advisors to the leader. Experienced members in the department acted as coaches for lecturers. In a harem and family, the hierarchical structure is revered. Violations of protocol are punished or the member is not supported by the leader. In an animal harem, dissent among younger members results in aggression and isolation (Smith 2011). In this study, Heads of Departments acted as authority figures with a mandate that had traces to a historical connection with the department.

Limitations of the Study

The study was based on archival data. Interviews could have shed more light on the harem and family concept in organisations. The prob-lem with interviews in this type of research is that some issues are sensitive. Naturalist observations have shown greater success in the study of animal and human behaviour in naturalist settings. An archival design was more preferable in this study because it used non-intrusive methods of data collection and analysis. The results of this study do not represent a national survey. The actual figures about the racial composition of university departments in all South African Universities can be obtained from the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study could be used in organisational development. The harem and family concept could be applied to organisational design and continuous improvement. Organisations that are facing transformation challenges could use the concept in helping employees understand the importance of diversity in organisational success. Training and development consultants could incorporate the harem and family concept in capacity building and organisational learning processes.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical model presented in this study can be used by organisations in re-engineering their organisational structures. The concept can be used in organisational design and resourcing strategies. The findings of this study showed that the harem and family as a group in organisations was characterised by the grouping of employees with common characteristics in one department. This included race or ethnicity, similarity of qualifications, source of lecturers' qualifications, similarity of the leader's qualifications to members' or subordinates' qualifications in the department and the source of the Heads of Departments' qualifications. The analysis showed that academic departments tended to employ lecturers who fitted into the ethnic or racial grouping and had an academic history that was connected to the department. The problem with the university organisational structure in Africa and abroad is that it is run as a single entity. It is an organisation with departments that are different and autonomous. An academic can be in one department of a university from their youth until they reach the age of retirement in old age. Unlike companies,

non-governmental organisations and government departments, university employees cannot be deployed or transferred to other branches or departments of the same organisation in other provinces and countries as a way of improving productivity, diversity, innovation, employee relations and prevention of organisational corruption. Future studies on the harem and family in organisations could focus on promotion of diversity, resource allocation and organisational transparency.

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