



MANAGING WORK PLACE DIVERSITY: ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Managing diversity in the workplace presents a set of unique challenges for HR professionals. It also considered one of the main challenges for human resource management in modern organizations. Diversity refers to an organization that internationally employs a workforce comprised of individuals varying gender, religion, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education and other attributes. In the coming years, organizations must understand how to manage diversity in the workplace effectively when it comes to recruiting and hiring talent. For an organization, despite its strategic importance, looking to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive workplace, the workforce considered as a generic and homogeneous category to take into account cultural differences among employees. The aim of this paper is to present a systematic review of the literature on diversity among employees at workplace. Besides aim the objective of this conceptual analysis is to identify issues, challenges, and managing strategies faced by HR people in an organization. Therefore, this paper identifies innovative and sustainable strategies for managing workplace diversity in present scenario. The paper also looks at how communication system, recruitment policy, training, conflict resolution strategies, managerial skills, and periodical feedback adopted by management used in managing workplace diversity.

Key Words: Workplace Diversity, Issues, Managing Strategies, Challenges.

Introduction

In recent years, due to increased globalization, higher workforce synergistic approaches, and the increasing multiplicity of jobs, diversity has come to play a centralized role in organizational life (Adler, 2002). To improve the overall performance, one of the most important factors for any organization is human capital. Human capital forms the role of engine that drives the organization. There are various reasons why diversity has become such a pressing concern now a day's such as globalization, changing labour orientations, team working strategies, shift from manufacturing to service economies, mergers and alliances, etc. (Cascio, 1998). Globalization requires more interaction among people from indifferent human nature, diverse cultures, beliefs, values, and backgrounds. The society no longer works nor lives in an island; people are now part of the worldwide economy with competition coming from all over the world. Diversity means difference. It is about generating a workforce that feels valued and respected and has its potential fully utilized in order to meet organizational goals. According to Dessler (2011) diversity refers to the variety or multiplicity of demographic features that characterize a company's workforce, particularly in terms of race, sex, culture, national origin, age etc. management of workplace diversity becomes a very important issue. Mismanaged diversity can be detrimental to the employee satisfaction and productivity.

India is passing through the phase of demographic transition, which could be the biggest opportunity of the country depending upon the utilization of its huge workforce. In present work culture, the employees of organizations are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Therefore, the diversity management is a necessary process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued. The workplace diversity management has become so important that all can reach their potential and maximize their contributions to achieve an organization's strategic goals and objectives. However, the focus of workplace diversity now lies on the promotion of individuality within an organization, acknowledging that every person can bring something different to the business and performance of the organization.



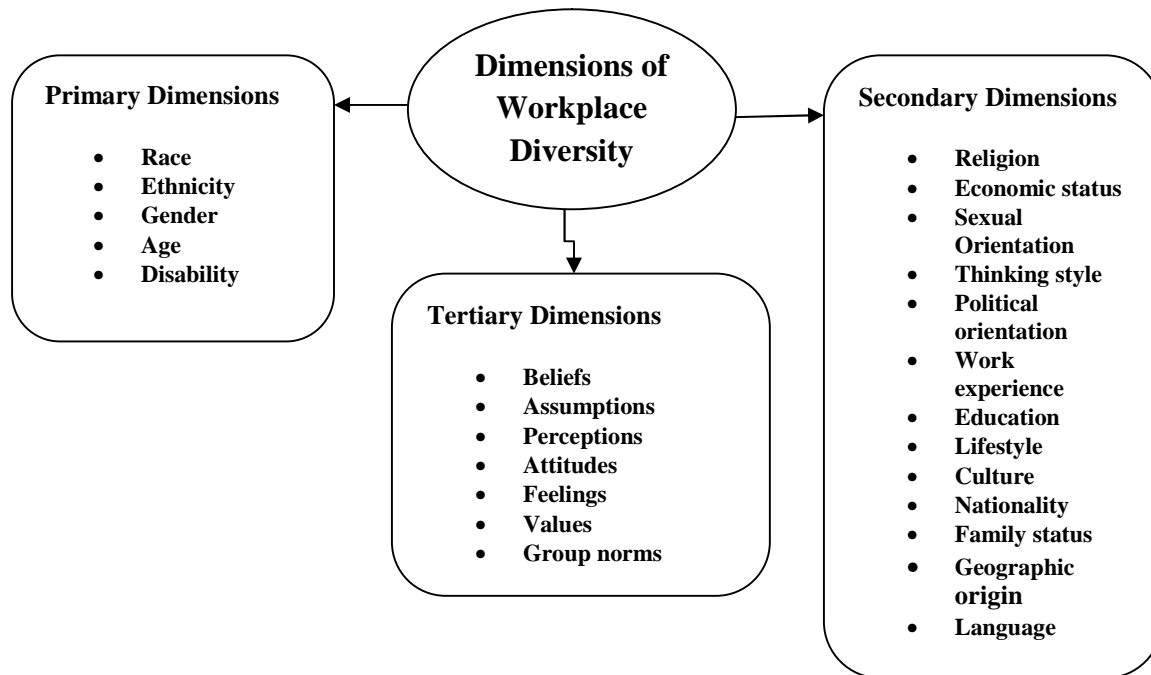
Workplace Diversity: The Concept

Diversity is generally defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences among people with regard to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status .To assure organizational success it is important to manage the diverse workforce in an organization. Managing a diverse workforce is not just ethical or social but it also demonstrates a good business oriented approach (Bateman & Snell, 2008). Managing diversity refers acknowledging people’s differences at work and recognizing these differences as much valuable as other systems. It also enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness.

Although, good management alone will not necessarily help an individual to work effectively with a diverse workforce in an organization, it has also become very important while the traditional notion of managing workplace diversity may refer to representations of various races, genders, and religious backgrounds. Today’s concept of workplace diversity is broad-based. Organizations must understand that managing diversity is much more than gaining knowledge on race and gender issues. The workforce diversity requires employers to be more sensitive to the differences that they must recognize and deal with the different values, needs, interests, and expectations of employees. Today’s managers have found that employees do not set aside their cultural values and life style preferences when they come to work. The challenges, therefore, is to make organizations more accommodating to diverse groups of people by addressing different lifestyles, family needs, and work styles (David A. DeCenzo, Robbins &Verhulst, 2017). Hence, managing diversity viewed as providing a perspective that can enhance creativity and growth of the workforce and the performance of the organization.

Dimensions of Workplace Diversity

Dimension of workplace diversity refers to workforce diversity of a company. The employees who work there and have different traits, backgrounds and abilities described under the dimensions of the diversity. There are three dimensions of workplace diversity given as under:



Source: Dimensions of Diversity, Adapted from Rijamampianina and Carmichael (2005).



Primary Dimensions: The primary dimension includes the differences of human beings related to age, gender, ethnicity, etc. These differences have an impact on initial encounters and can be easily identify throughout the world. These are inborn differences and have an impact throughout one's life.

Secondary Dimensions: The secondary dimension includes education level, religion, income level, geographical location, nationality, etc. These are not easily identified and have a deeper impact on person's personality. The secondary dimension can only be identifying after some interaction and conversation. These can be acquired or changed throughout one's lifetime and have less impact.

Tertiary Dimensions: The tertiary dimensions are those aspects of diversity that include beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, attitudes, feelings etc. of individuals.

Managing Diversity: The Past Experience

Managing diversity experiences from several organizations and managerial exposures have contributed a variety of decision-making and systematic planned techniques to promote heterogeneous mix of employees. Some insights from past studies cited to mirror the increasingly diverse nature of work force and their usefulness for HR practices reflected as effective decision-making strategies.

In today's work environment workplace diversity played very important role in accepting challenge of people management. A study on "Managing Workforce diversity through HR practices" reveals that HR diversity management strategies such as diversity related training programmes, diversity support groups, flexible timings, work-life balance, diversity audit, etc., act as mediator between workforce diversity and performance management(Kundu&Bansal, 2015).

Increasing diversity across the globe creates the great challenge for management. A study conducted on "Managing workplace diversity: Challenges and Strategies" shows that respecting individual differences benefit the workplace diversity to enjoy a competitive age and enhance motivation of employees. Diversity management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to career performance opportunities (Dhuppar,2015).

The commitment to diversity management expressed the attitude of management to express the strategic response phenomenon highlighted in "Managing workplace diversity: Issues and Challenges" and found that discrimination was the most frequently encountered barrier for accepting workplace diversity, followed by prejudice and ethnocentrism. In addition, most of the employees are positive that they can cope with diversity, while a few of the employees have understood, adjusted, and are enthusiastic to work and leverage positive workplace diversity(Patrick and Kumar 2012).

Managing diversity refers to proactive and self-efficacies behaviour of management to ensure high value branding in corporate world. Eventually, the companies considered managing diversity topmost priority throughout its global management operations. Some studies of similar nature conducted such as "Managing Workplace Diversity: A Kenyan Perspective" elaborated the concept. This study found that diverse work group brings high values, good reputation, and high productivity to the organization. In addition, management tools in a diverse workforce educate human resources about diversity and its issues, including laws and regulations for effective management (Wambui et.al 2013).

Issues, Challenges and Benefits Involved In Workplace Diversity

The management of workplace diversity requires that the employers to be more sensitive to the differences and manage them by adopting the strategic management approach in due course of time for the consistent effectiveness and growth of the organization. The following issues and challenges are important to address and taken care of by the HR managers.



Individual Differences: Individual differences are very important to manage when prejudice, racism, discrimination and a lack of respect creep into a work environment, conflict among employees becomes unavoidable. Such problem in the workplace can turn explosive or even violent and affect the work culture, employee-employer relationship in terms of mutual trust and faith. Larger the ignorance experienced by the management creates greater the possibility of differences which convert in conflicts between employees and employers.

Resistance to Change: Workplace diversity benefits an organization as a whole while considering the value added competencies. However, some employees and managers may not react positively to such changes made by the organization. Employees who oppose workplace diversity usually reject new ideas and make work environments more difficult.

Inter-cultural Communication: Inter-cultural communication barriers lead to problems in a company attempting to create a diverse workplace. When companies hire employees of other cultures, managers may experience difficulties communicating with one another. This can lead to misunderstandings and a decrease in productivity. Therefore, effective intercultural communication must exist within and outside the organization so that everyone needs to know the organization's diversity initiative.

Multiculturalism: Multiculturalism highlights that some people have unfair prejudices, against people of different colors, cultures, ethnicity, or religion than their own. This issue creates a big challenge in managing workplace diversity. The way organization views diversity depends on the cultural values of the people considering the range of difference in the population and attitudes toward these differences. There is no prejudice or discrimination in multicultural environment. All employees identify equally with the organization and differences in the groups are minimal.

Generation Gaps: Most of the time generation gaps become an important issue and challenge that highlight the age differences, which can cause separation of the company as a unit. Bridging this gap between multiple generations of workers can sometimes become an issue for employers attempting to establish teamwork and inclusive nature of work capabilities.

Globalization: In a global environment, the various changes in terms of language, culture, and religion of both customers and workers represent a challenge in an organization. This diverse nature of environment becomes a big challenge for management and issue that is even more diverse in nature.

Negative Attitude: Issues of negative attitudes and behaviors can become barriers to organizational diversity management because they harm working relationships and damage morale and work productivity of workforce. Negative attitude and behavior in the workplace include prejudice, stereotyping, etc. Another view of negative attitude is lack of management education and desired affirmative action to eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, religion color, age, disability, national origin, and citizenship status.

Implementation of Ideas: Most of the organizations face challenges when attempting to implement changes with a view to cope up the competitive environment. The implementation process may present challenges to everyone involved, and frustrations may arise because implementation is not as smooth as expected. Hence, the diversity management suggests the implementation of ideas for dealing such managerial issues.

Key Benefits of Workplace Diversity

Variety of Different Perspectives: Diversity in the workplace ensures a variety of different perspectives. Diversity in the workplace means that employees will have different characteristics and backgrounds; they are also more likely to have a variety of different skills and experiences. Consequently, employees in a company with higher workplace diversity will have access to a variety of different perspectives, which is highly beneficial.



Increased Creativity: People with different background tend to have different experiences and thus different perspectives. Exposure to a variety of different perspective and view leads to higher creativity. Therefore, diversity management in the workplace leads to obtain and sustain increased creativity.

Greater Innovation: According to Josh Bersin research, inclusive companies are 1.7 times more likely to be innovation leaders in their market. In a diverse workplace, employees are exposed to multiple aspects and worldviews. When these various perspectives combine, they often come together in novel ways, opening doors to innovation.

Faster Problem Solving: Harvard Business Review found diverse teams are able to solve problems faster than cognitively similar people are. Employees from diverse backgrounds have different experiences and views, which is why they are able to will bring diverse solutions to the table. Thus, the best solution can be chosen sooner, which leads to faster problem solving.

Better Decision-making: Workplace diversity leads to better decision making. There is a direct link between workplace diversity and decision-making. Researchers found that when diverse teams made a business decision, they outperformed individual decision-makers.

Increased Profits: Companies with diverse workforce make a better decision faster, which gives them a serious advantage over their competitors. As a result, companies with diversity in the workplace achieve better business results and reap more profit.

Higher Employee Engagement: The link between workplace diversity and employee engagement is straightforward when employees feel more engaged and feel included in such decision making of the organization.

Reduced Employee Turnover: Workplace diversity is beneficial for employee retention. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace cause all employees to feel accepted and valued. When employees feel accepted and valued, they are also happier in their workplace and stay longer with a company. As a result, companies with greater diversity in the workplace have lower turnover rates.

Company Reputation: Among other benefits of workplace, diversity considers in this paper have company reputation as an important indicator of managing diversity. Workplace diversity boosts the company's reputation and brand. Companies, those are dedicated to building and promoting diversity in the workplace seen as good, more human concern oriented, and socially responsible organizations.

Improved Hiring Results: Diversity leads to better hiring results. Diversity in the workplace boosts a company's employer brand and presents a company as a more desirable place to work. Workplace diversity is an especially beneficial asset for attracting top talent from diverse talent pools.

Managing Strategies

For successful management of diversity it is very important to create a harmonious environment by implementing available literature evidence and outcome of the research studies. A message regarding competencies and capabilities of diverse workforce yielding competitive advantage particularly in areas such as problem solving, creativity, innovation, and flexibility enhances overall organizational performance (Kossek et al., 2005; Kreitz, 2008). Several HR diversity management practices also enhance diversity management. It is very important to communicate the diverse workforce that heterogeneity has an additional advantage for managing work very efficiently because of the following benefits and advantages of workplace diversity.

Recognize Workplace Diversity: In today's world, workplace diversity management is an evolving concept. Managing diversity refers to a proactive approach intended to manage a heterogeneous workforce in such a way so that the potential advantages of diversity maximized while its potential disadvantages minimized.



Creating Awareness: So far as, workplace diversity management presents a positive view of managing people by creating awareness among them at different levels of management and organization systems. Innovative management must create awareness in the organization that differences among people as to age, sex, education, culture etc. exist in workforce; so that people may try to understand one another in a more rational and friendly manner.

Creating Common Organizational Culture: Organization must develop cross-cultural training programmers to address workplace diversity. Culture creates good conditions for development of a common organizational values and ethics. Therefore, such common culture will create an environment in which a diversified workforce can co-exist comfortably, peacefully and happily.

Career Development Programmes: There must be programmers for identifying each individual's strengths, weaknesses and potential for career development; so that the organization can capitalize on the peculiar features of a diversified workforce. In fact, people should be valued for their difference and variety.

Managing Discriminations: Discrimination at workplace occurs between people in an environment and background of indifferent beliefs, faiths, and values. To manage workplace diversity "work as worship" a strategic management technique for establishing excellent workforce diversity management is important to avoid any sort of discrimination among people on the basis of age, race, background, culture, and sex.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment: With the entry of a large number of women in organizations, the phenomenon of sexual harassment usually anticipated. Organizations must ensure the transparent indiscriminate working environment policy by fixing the responsibility at appropriate line management level during working hours at all costs. Sexual harassment includes a range of actions, such as unwelcome touching, joking, teasing, and the display of sexually explicit materials.

Committees of Diverse Members: Committees of diverse members must consider the required skills and capabilities for evaluating and addressing complaints of people, regarding their sad experience of working in the organization. This process of forming committees of diverse nature exists in the diverse workplace environment.

Create Inclusive Policies and Practices: It is important to say that organization's overall practices and policies are inclusive of everyone and do not favor or discriminate a certain set of employees. In addition, it is very important to ensure that every employee understands all of the organization's unwritten rules to ensure inclusion from the get-go.

Facilitate effective communication: there should be a clear and effective communication throughout the organization. To ensure everyone is on the same page, make sure that all the employees understand all the procedures, policies, safety rules and any other important information. Work to ensure that cultural and language barriers are overcome when communicating with employees.

Diversity Training to Encourage Interaction: It is only through interactions with one another can diverse groups of people really understand, appreciate, and respect the differences that exist among them. Training is a widely used technique to manage people in organizations. Such training designed to raise levels of awareness and sensitivity to diverse issues focusing on from various aspects of managing diversity. Many companies around the globe started extensive programs offering entire range of courses including diversity as a competitive advantage, the spirit of diversity, transition to diversity, sexual harassment and diversity management, and diversity awareness and interviewing (Dass and Parker, 1999).

Managerial Implications

With the challenges of globalization and multiculturalism, the managers' job has become a big challenge of managing workplace diversity. Sometimes it has unintended results with multiple influences on attitude and behavior of employees causing negative organizational performance. Effective and efficient managers must understand the outcomes of diversity in terms of potential impact on attitude of workforce and performance of the



organization. In order to manage the diverse nature of HR at workplace frequent interactions and social association approaches required for effective management functions and decision-making. It is therefore, important for managers to realize and manage the diversity impact on organizational work culture.

Conclusions

This study builds on previous research showing diversity management favorable psychological environment in the workplace and their significant practical implications for HR managers. In present organizational management context, it helps to manage diverse workforce and emphasizes significant influence on performance outcomes of the organization. Without managing workplace diversity, no organization can survive in this era of globalization. For sustaining competitive advantage of achieved performance, it is important to capitalize the potential benefits of the workforce diversity in workplace. This paper extends the influence of HR capabilities of diverse workplace management in all types of organizations. It has also been reveals from the existing review of literature that workplace diversity management strengthens managements' commitment towards successful HR diversity practices. Further, it highlights an organizations' approach to manage coming challenges of environment positively.

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