



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514

VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 9 | JUNE - 2019



DILEMMAS & CHALLENGES OF MANAGING WORK FORCE DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT:

This article explores various dilemmas, difficulties & various challenges of managing work force diversity in this new millennium. Workforce management is a process to have the right number of personnel available at the right time. Management of Diversity is fast becoming a significant issue in this era of globalization, as there is multicultural workforce, in almost all organizations. Due to this the productivity and efficiency of the workforce is greatly affected. The aim of this research is to find out the difficulties of diversity management in a company. Through this paper the theoretical aspect of 'paradigms of diversity management' are highlighted and its application to companies are identified. The findings of the study would benefit all organizations, as it provides guidelines and recommendations for management of diversity. The author developed a conceptual framework for examining the dilemmas & difficulties associated with managing workforce diversity.



KEYWORDS: Work force, Diversity management, Cultural synergy, Multicultural Work force,

INTRODUCTION :

more competitive, but with that workforce diversity also brings its own issues and challenges. Managing workforce diversity implies creating an organisational climate in which a heterogeneous workforce performs to its best potential; without the organisation favouring or not favouring any particular segment of workforce with a view to facilitating the best attainment of organisational goals. The concept of diversity includes acceptance

and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and fostering environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity

contained within each individual. Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing; recognizing that personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and

building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in an organization. That sounds simple, but diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnic group, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background, and more. Diversity involves not only how people perceive themselves but also how they perceive others. Those perceptions affect their interactions. For a wide assortment of employees to function effectively as an organization, human resource professionals need to deal effectively with issues such as communication, adaptability, and change. Diversity management is a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued, so that all can reach their potential and maximize their contributions to an organization's strategic goals and objectives.

FEATURES OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT:

- Workforce diversity management aims at making people work to the best of their potential
- Work-force diversity management strives to work towards the best attainment of organisational objectives & goals.
- Workforce diversity management results in creating an organisational climate, wherein, employees from all walks of life, different cultural, social backgrounds and being different in terms of age, gender, education etc., can co-exist and work, with coordination & co-operation among each other.
- Workforce diversity management endures that there is no discrimination among employees, in any manner.

DIMENSION OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Gender-Male workers are usually aggressive, bold and materialistic; while female workers possess sympathy for others and are more concerned with quality of life. What is important to observe is that people of both sex have material differences in outlook, nature, habits etc There is the third gender as well, which has to be taken care of by the management.

Education- In an organisation people may range from less educated to highly educated. Educated people have a broad outlook and are open-minded. They are endowed with logic and rationality and usually dislike discrimination among individuals on petty grounds of caste, colour, religion etc.

Culture- Culture is a complex of race, religion, language, social traditions and values etc. People from different cultural backgrounds may have ethnic orientations i.e. a sense of favouritism towards their nation, race or tribe, which they belong to.

Age- People belonging to different age groups cause diversity in workforce. Young people may be enriched with health, merit, capacity for hard-work etc.; while elderly people may possess more maturity than their junior counterparts and are more experienced.

Psychology- It refers to the way one thinks or behaves in a particular way. In an organisation, there are people with different psychology. Some may be optimistic or pessimistic; some may be bold or timid or so on. Psychology is always a manifestation of family background and social affiliations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

It leads to improved Human Relations- Workforce diversity management aims at developing and nurturing a common organisational culture and climate; which enable people from diverse culture and backgrounds to co-exist peacefully. Such a common organisational culture and climate leads to better human relations in the enterprise and produces all-round organisational and managerial efficiency.

It Prevents Unnecessary Labour Turnover- When in an organisation there is good workforce diversity management; women and other dis-satisfied people are prevented from leaving the organisation. In case otherwise, when there is large labour turnover because of poor workforce diversity management; investment made in manpower may go waste, with other bad consequences for the organisation. In fact, employees leave the organisation when they do not feel comfortable and duly cared for by management.

It has the ability to deal with diverse market- Culturally diverse workforce can better appreciate the needs, feedings, and attitudes of culturally diverse consumers. Thus workforce diversity increases the competence of a corporation to deal with a market; that consists of diverse consumer groups in respect of age, sex, culture etc.

Workforce diversity helps in Building of Goodwill of the Enterprise- Companies with excellent workforce diversity management build goodwill in the society. As such, talented people of society with diverse backgrounds and culture get attracted towards it for seeking suitable employment. Such companies never have a problem of the scarcity of skilled, educated and talented human capital.

It results in better Decision-Making- People from heterogeneous backgrounds may aid management in better decision-making, by offering suggestions from a wide range of perspectives and orientations. In fact, heterogeneous groups of people may be more creative and innovative; when they pool their knowledge and experiences and agree on a common solution to a tricky problem; which might aid management in making excellent decisions for the organisation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers have suggested that diversity has enhanced performance by broadening the group's perspectives.

Watson et al., (1993) examined the effect of cultural diversity on interaction processes and performance in a 17 week experimental study on 173 undergraduate students. On the basis of their study, cultural diversity was as a result of ethnic and national differences among the group members, they also established that diversity has negative impacts on process and performance in recently formed groups. The study established that culturally diverse groups, in comparison to homogeneous groups, are less effective in terms of interaction and job performance. The researchers examined three mechanisms that influence group effectiveness. Results supported the view that the cultural diversity of the group, their socio-cultural norms, and their relative cultural distance from each other, effectiveness of the group. Groups that had Cultural homogeneity had higher performance than the groups, which were culturally heterogeneous. The study described the inclusion of cultural diversity without considering the perceptions of workforce, results in negative group performance. The results of this study indicate the importance of identifying differences in perceptions of diverse employees to get successful results in group performance and managing multicultural groups in global organizations.

Kossek and Zonia, (1993), carried out research, in the area of assessing diversity climate, examined the relationships among group characteristics, in terms of racial-ethnicity, gender and level, contextual organizational unit characteristics, namely gender and racial-ethnic heterogeneity and resource support for women and perceptions of diversity by employees. This research established that women employees appreciated the employer efforts to promote diversity, in comparison to male employees, whose concern was lower in heir comparison. However the male employees had a greater favourable attitude about the qualifications of women. Results of this research established that gender heterogeneity was significantly related to acceptance of diversity. The result pointed out that the more the ratio of women was in a unit, the more favourable diversity was seen in activities,

Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008 found out that there is a strong empirical affirmation that successful diversity management and improvement resulting there from are positively correlated, in organizational performance

Researchers Knippenberg, de Dreu, & Homan, 2004 found that members become more familiar with each others' perspectives and develop transitive memory & that Group members' ability to elaborate diverse information may also develop over time. This suggests that diverse work groups can reach more extended tenure, in comparison to the more homogeneous group as they are allowed a more extended start-up phase. The consistent finding states that differences should be sought in moderation.

Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005 studied the oil & gas industry & established, through their research that, in the oil and gas industry, expertise levels , at moderate levels of their performance, diversity were most strongly associated with team performance.

Patrick (2010) , carried out their study & found that diversity determines not only the effects of the diversity within an organization but also the level of openness to characteristics, which are dissimilar, among the members of the organization, work groups, and culture.

Moran, Harris, & Moran, 2011 stated that, international relations require us to deal with one another on a person-to-person basis, irrespective of the advanced technological communication systems. In order to make it effective, language and other typical barriers have to be overcome. However, they suggested that this could be possible only after the mental thought process was changed and the individual employees were viewed as having just different backgrounds and not viewing them as aliens.

Simlin (2006) carried out their research and established that with a decrease in the perception of diversity openness with an increase in the age of the employee. Therefore, it is important to orient the older employees, through training, workshops, group discussions & also about the presence and need of diversity openness in organizations..

Hofstede, 1994 found that the global leaders must not only learn the customs, courtesies, and business protocols of their counterparts from other countries but must also understand the national character, management philosophies, and mind-sets of the people in order to create opportunities for collaboration.

Jenny Watson, Deputy Chairman of the UK's Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), identified that sexual harassment was experienced by huge number of British Workers. They took serious note of it and stated that it was no laughing matter for those who experience it. Empirical research supports the notion that diversity management can have a positive spill over effect in the workplace.

Research by Gilbert, Stead, and Ivancevich (1999) established that women employees were stigmatized irrespective of their job type. They also found that women who valued diversity were found to be qualified for the job that they held.

Cox (1993), carried out a huge work on diversity in organizations and explained the significance of managing diversity in workplace. According to him diversity , on its own could not have automatic positive effects. It must rather be managed effectively to improve organizational effectiveness. Cox defined the diversity management Goals and discussed the importance of managing diversity in the organizations. He also identified the importance of planning and implementing organizational systems & practices to manage people so as to maximise the potential benefits of diversity & minimise the potential disadvantages. He used the term "**diversity climate**" to define the collective influence of individual, group and organizational factors that support diversity in an organization.

Woods and Sciarini (1995), established, through their research that employers who successfully manage diversity are better at equipped to attract and retain the skilled and talented employees. He also found that the employers are successfully managing diversity, because of the efforts, which have been incorporated to recognize, and to embrace the diversity in organizations. The study explains that diversity issues are gaining importance, as the economies are shifting from manufacturing to service economies, because in a service economy, effective interactions and communications between people are essential to business success. Employers who adopt diversity can also benefit from cost savings by having a more cost-effective recruitment process. The study identified that where the employee can pursue their career aspirations without being inhibited by gender, race, nationality, religion, or other factors, there is a need for a particular type of organizational culture that supports this goal.

Williams and O'Reilly (1998)⁵⁴, in their research paper, identified that, managing of workforce diversity is one of the most difficult and pressing challenges of modern organizations. They called diversity as "**hot-button**" issue in corporate, political, and legal circles, as maximizing and capitalizing on workplace diversity has become an important issue for management. The researchers also found that the demographic differences like sex, age are conventionally related to team level outcomes. The study identified the importance of understanding about the history of diversity management, which gives an idea about the evolution of the interest in a diverse workforce in organizations. The paper explained the need of more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds to

manage diversity. This study explores that managers in public and private organizations should understand, predict and evaluate the nature of the diverse workforce to make diversity initiatives successful in multicultural organizations.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The author felt that diverse people and their perspectives have become a major concern for every organization & accordingly, found the topic very interesting. It is worth noting that repercussions for not being able to manage diversity well, leads to lack of skills, competencies, and interests in employees, which increases employee turnover and reduces performance to a great extent. Organizations that manage diversity receive more commitment, and better satisfied employees. Diversity management intends to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued, so that all can reach their potential and maximize their contributions to an organization's strategic goals and objectives. Diversity management ensures that all employees have the opportunity to maximize their potential and enhance their self-development and their contribution to the organization. It recognizes that people from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas and perceptions, which can make the way work is done more efficient and make products and services better. Managing diversity successfully will help organizations to nurture creativity and innovation and thereby to tap hidden capacity for growth and improved competitiveness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find the most important strategies adopted to enhance workplace diversity
- To identify barriers for accepting workplace diversity
- To ascertain strategies to increase inclusiveness
- To find out ways to increase awareness about workplace diversity

METHODOLOGY

- Various studies have been thoroughly studied to get an insight into the work force diversity concept.
- Random organizations were contacted to take their input on the subject
- Necessary materials have been studied, in-depth, to arrive at conclusions and for making suggestions.

CONCLUSIONS

Organizations with diverse employees are better suited to serve diverse external customers in an increasingly global market. Such organizations have a better understanding of the requirements of the legal, political, social, economic, and cultural environments.

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

The major strategies adopted by organizations to increase inclusiveness is by training employees to be sensitive to cross-cultural differences, encouraging employees to accept overseas assignments, and offering foreign language training.

PROBLEMS IN ACCEPTING DIVERSITY

- **Lack of Acceptance and Respect-** When there is a lack of acceptance of the diverse culture and beliefs among employees, conflicts may arise. Sometimes, this conflict turns to animosity and may even effectuate situations of violence.
- **Difference of Beliefs-** Diversity in cultural, spiritual, and political beliefs can sometimes pose a challenge in a diverse workplace.

- **Ethnic and Cultural Differences-** Issues from ethnic and cultural differences are still present in all the workplace. There are still some individuals who hold prejudice against people who have different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds as their own.
- **Gender discrimination-** According to a recent survey, 40% of people believe that both men and women will hire men over women. This is supported by another study that shows that men are 30% more likely to be promoted to a managerial position than women. Additionally, men earn an approximately 24.1% higher base pay than women.
- **Physical and Mental Disabilities-** Often, disabled employees have a difficult time navigating through their workplace because proper accommodations as simple as wheelchair ramps are not available.
- **Generation Gaps-** By 2025, millennials will make up 75% of the workforce, and they are changing the work culture. Employees from other generations may have difficulties adapting to changes in the workplace and the work culture that the younger generation are bringing about. In larger corporations, there are more diversified age groups, from teenagers to senior citizens. As a result, cliques and social circles may be formed, and some workers may be isolated from the team.
- **Language and Communication barriers-** Language and communication barriers are ever-present in companies with a diverse workforce. Therefore, employees and managers sometimes have difficulties in getting their message across. This can lead to miscommunication and productivity loss.

RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

Suggested Techniques of Workforce Diversity Management

Acceptance -When employees accept the differences between each other, it results in a sharing of ideas and effective collaboration. Acceptance fosters mutual respect and prevents conflicts from arising. Diversity training will help employees understand, accept, and respect each other's differences.

Sharing beliefs-Employees need to be reminded that they should not impose their beliefs on others to prevent spats and disputes. They also need to make sure to keep their ethnic and personal beliefs independent of their work responsibilities and duties.

Zero tolerance for prejudice and discrimination -The prejudice and discrimination should never be tolerated in the workplace (or anywhere else). Internal company policies with clear and objective regulations should be put in place to prevent employees from demonstrating prejudice. Cultural sensitivities training and diversity awareness programs in the workplace can help address this issue.

Gender equality- In the past, women were paid less than men, but the Equal Pay Act has changed that. In recent years, there has been an influx of women in the workplace. Employers need to prevent gender discrimination and maintain equality regarding hiring, salary, opportunities, and promotions.

Care for people with physical or mental disabilities -Have procedures in place for people with physical or mental disabilities. Some companies have a "quiet room" so that when employees start to feel anxious, they can use that room to ease their anxiety. Be supportive to your disabled employees and avoid discriminatory or derogatory remarks. Ensuring a fair and comfortable work environment for employees with physical and mental disabilities helps successfully create a more diverse workforce.

Committees of Diverse Members- Committees of diverse members must be formed for evaluating and addressing complaints of people, regarding their sad experience of working in the organisation. Diversity management is a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment where the similarities and differences of individuals are valued. The literature on diversity management has mostly emphasized on organization culture; its impact on diversity openness; human resource management practices; institutional environments and organizational contexts to diversity-related pressures, expectations, requirements, and incentives; perceived practices and organizational outcomes related to managing employee diversity; and several other issues. The current study examines the potential barriers to workplace diversity and suggests strategies to enhance workplace diversity and inclusiveness. It is based on a survey of 300 IT employees. The study concludes that successfully

managing diversity can lead to more committed, better satisfied, better performing employees and potentially better financial performance for an organization.

Creating Awareness of Diversity- Management must create awareness in the organisation 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.

Programmes of Special Care for Diversified Workforce:

Management must design programmes of special care, like the following:

- Care for elderly people
- Special work schedules to provide convenience to female workers etc.

Career Development Programmes- There must be programmes 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.

Creating Conditions for Common Organisational Culture- Organisation must develop cross-cultural training programmes creating conditions for development of a common organisational culture and climate. Such common culture will create an environment in which a diversified work force can co-exist comfortably, peacefully and happily.

Avoiding Discriminations- A very significant technique for excellent workforce diversity management is to avoid any sort of discrimination among people on the basis of age, culture and specially sex. In the most developed country the U.S.A, the Glass Ceiling Commission states that between 95 and 97 percent of senior managers in the country's biggest corporations are men. The term 'glass ceiling' describes the process by which women are barred from promotion by means of an invisible barrier.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment- With the entry of a large number of women in organisations, the phenomenon of sexual harassment is usually witnessed; which management must prevent by all means and at all costs. Sexual harassment includes a range of actions, like – unwelcome touching, joking, teasing, innuendoes (indirectly bad and rude remarks), slurs, and the display of sexually explicit materials.

Need to change perception about Diversity as a Buzzword- Too many organizations fall prey to superficial efforts to increase diversity. Building a diverse and inclusive organization is something one must work on every day.

Make Diversity Part of Hiring Process- Building a diverse organization from the ground up takes time. Hiring process should be reviewed to ensure that diverse candidates are being interviewed.

Make alignment of leadership with Goals- Managing a diverse culture can be challenging at times. Leadership must be briefed about plans relating to hiring process & need to care for diversity.

Have Policies favourable for Systemic equality- Creating a more inclusive organization takes effort. But no matter what actions an organization takes, it must also be ensure that its policies are not promoting systemic inequality. Ensure that the policy is supportive of LGBTQ parents as well as traditional couples.

Create a Culture of Empathy and Forgiveness- Leaders should accept mistakes, and encourage others to do the same. One way leaders can do this is by adopting a servant leadership mindset. This will lead to unlocking the potential in the employees. By tailoring leadership philosophies to meet the needs of employees, there will be a need to empathize with them.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study suggest several prospects for further research.

There is vast scope for further study of the factors affecting workplace diversity in various specific industries.

Furthermore, diversity management practices can be compared between industries, and their impact on employee productivity and job satisfaction can be studied.

There is also a vast scope for studies of perceptions of workplace diversity in different ethnic groups, religion-based groups, and marginalized groups.

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