

Workforce Diversity within Organization: A Unique Framework

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ABSTRACT:

Diversity is a complex concept. All organizations across the globe are combating with the opportunities and the challenges of workforce diversity. The workforce diversity has a unique potential to feed organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and to streamline social justice and strengthens harmony. It is not so simple or not a straight forward process to realize and achieve full benefits of workforce diversity.

It is one thing to create diversity by recruiting people of different nationality, cultural background, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, discipline or work style. It is exactly another thing to develop a collaborative environment that supports workforce diversified background to harmonize and contribute with full efficiency to the organizational effectiveness. And it is yet another thing to have a professionally satisfied feeling. It is moreover a great challenge to fully integrate the varied knowledge, experiences, perspectives and values that people of diverse backgrounds bring into an organization's strategy, goals, work, products, systems and structures.

The actual essence of this study is to integrate diversified workforce to achieve overall organizational effectiveness at all levels and dimensions of work, structures and processes. It is of great focus to have a comprehensive approach required as first most essentiality for any organization to reap the fullest benefits from diversity in terms of enhancing equity, effectiveness and efficiency. With this vision of diversity, we refer to “**working with diversity**”, rather than “**managing diversity**”.

KEYWORDS:

Cultural Background, Diversity, Efficiency, Harmony, Organizational effectiveness and Social Justice,

INTRODUCTION:

Effects of diversity are most effective and sustainable when they are synergized while formulating strategic objectives of the organizations. With this thought we try to emphasize that

each organization should undergo a strategic analysis to define diversification in a very systematic and meaningful manner. This is what many experts call “*building the business case*” for diversity. The concept of diversification has evolved due to the practical presence of diversified workforce among organizations, which in turn are results of religion, caste and creed, race, language, ethnicity, language, food habits, lifestyles, gender and sexual orientation, likes/dislikes, preferences etc. To maintain the harmonious relation and meeting organizational effectiveness with determination is truly cumbersome. This study aims at understanding the benefits accrued through diversification on behalf of above mentioned arenas at the work place, and tries to reduce the friction by provision of solutions for the diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work force diversity connects directly to the work of the organization and to the human element present within it. It implies that diversity is the work and responsibility of everyone, not just of the managers and leaders. It suggests that diversity is an asset to be used and developed, rather than a problem to be managed. And, it projects a sense of dynamism and continuity. As we are concerned to work with diversity we actually review the potential benefits of workforce diversity. This conceptualization explains the “*motive forces*” responsible for diversification, those are as under:

1. To enhance innovation and creativity
2. Problem solving techniques
3. Strengthening supportive and collaborative styles of working
4. Combating workforce change demography
5. Retaining high quality workforce
6. Enhancing operational effectiveness
7. Developing social justice and equity
8. Promoting performance and organizational repute
9. Boosting industrial cohesiveness
10. Broader accessibility to shareholders, customers, clientele, beneficiaries, and stakeholders.
11. Enhancing satisfaction level of employees
12. Maintaining working culture
13. Overcoming and reducing conflict and grievances.

The thorough review of research and experience emerging through these forces (motive) reveals that diversification in terms of working environment and organizational culture can bring significant benefits to the organizations. Diversity although brings challenges yet brings opportunities to successively develops and improves organizational performance and it's a better cause to bring harmony and equity among organizations.

As and when any organization carries out workforce diversity it enhances of its motive forces for working with diversification, it becomes responsibility of the organization to ground its diversity vision in its specific context. It requires having development of an operational definition that will focus on all the dimensions of diversity that are very much essential for supporting, developing and boosting its organizational effectiveness as well as efficiency. To meet the motive of effectiveness and efficiency within the organizational levels, there can be three basic approaches. These fundamental dimensions can be summarized as follows:

1. Approach of social differences
2. Approach of cultural differences
3. Approach of cognitive functional differences

These approaches represent distinct and major streams of work on diversity. Concerning the organizations in view there three fundamental approaches analyze the differences in group affiliation effecting the organization's work culture, systems and work practices; its social relations; and individuals' behaviors and work and career outcomes. "In short, (group identities) provide the approaches through which people view and experience their world" (Thompson and Gooler, 1996:404). The approaches primarily differ with the types of group differences treated. It is quite important to understand the spectrum of three dimensional diversity approaches that intersect and inform each other.

SOCIAL DIFFERENCES APPROACH

It focuses on differences evolved through members of identity groups reflecting salient social categorizations, such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, age or sexual orientation. An identity group is a group whose members have participated in equivalent historical experiences, are currently subjected to similar social forces and, as a result, have compatible world views.

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(ALDERFER, 1987)

With the perceptive of social differences approach such identity group categories are seen as socially marked which means that they are very significant in providing shape to organized societies and how individuals among these societies are categorized. The approach recognizes that *"individuals do not leave their racial, gender or ethnic identities at the door when they enter an organization"* (Nkomo and Cox, 1996:342).

Among the organized societies if we talk about the categorization we exactly mean shaping up of the distribution of roles power, opportunities and resources within societies. Hence, in many of the societies these identity categories are "legislated" for ensuring equality, harmony, provision of same and equal opportunities along with prevention discrimination at any part. The focus of this approach is on how differences among group identities affect work behaviors, distribution of equal opportunities, social relations and social concerns, and at the last total work out in the organizations.

It majorly focuses on the way the social identities shapes perspectives, values and experiences and optimum know how to ensure how such differences and variances can be completely utilized within the organizations to achieve organizational commitments, organizational effectiveness and also organizational efficiency.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES APPROACH

It is a major area of concern when we talk about an approach linked with culture .we primarily talk about differences emerged because of the different cultures. Culture is actually a patterned

way of thinking, acting, feeling and interpreting. Approach of cultural differences covers diverse ethnicity, diverse nationalities and their implications on organizational commitments and organizational effectiveness. It consists of norms, values, beliefs and expressive symbols that members of a group use to create meaning and interpret behaviors. Adler (1986:111), reflecting on the interaction of cultural diversity on work team performance in international settings, underscores the importance of working intentionally with diversity.

This approach tries to analyze how culture and cultural differences affect social relations, work behaviors, communications and expectations among organizations, as well as how differences in values and norms shaped by a society's culture affect organizational culture and norms of effective management. With the perspective of cultural differences approach, it emphasizes that culture influences almost all aspects of management, including leadership styles and leadership behaviors and management, organizational factors, management systems and organizational functions.

The cultural differences have been evolved and are pertaining as well as steadily growing due to essence of globalization. There are two major approaches under this head that can be summarized as under:

- 1) Cross cultural comparative approach, and
- 2) International management approach

COGNITIVE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

Focusing upon individuals' styles to access information, and, how they grasp and acquire knowledge as well as emphasizing upon diversity in task related knowledge, skills and experiences, is the area where cognitive functional approach seeks to look upon. The task related knowledge & skills are emerged & shaped by educational background, disciplinary training, organizational tenure, or organizational function, specialization and level. Functional and disciplinary diversity works with differences in the content and skill aspects of task-related differences.

Cognitive diversity comprises of style range of how people gain information and knowledge and also the way they experiences, analyses, interpret and applies. As the cognitive functional approach emphasizes on task related diversity, it opens a link between;

1. Diversity and organization,
2. Organization and work behavior,
3. Work behavior and work group performance.

Differences tend to be seen as neutral and objective and this approach gives significant attention to the impact of cognitive-functional diversity on individuals' career outcomes.

DIVERSIFICATION IN ORIGINATIONS

To understand the concept of diversification among organizations, we look forward for Holvino's Multicultural Organizational Development Model which provides a useful framework of the stages of an organization's transformation towards complex through simplicity, that means transcending from a *monoculture*, an exclusionary organization where the values of one group, culture or style are dominant, to *multicultural*, and an inclusive organization where the values of diverse people are valued and contribute to organizational goals and excellence.

Most organizations using the organizational development approach for the designing and implementing diversity initiatives follows a five-step process:

- 1) Preparing for the initiative;
- 2) Assessing needs related to diversity;
- 3) Developing a vision, goals and a strategic plan;
- 4) Implementing the interventions selected; and
- 5) Monitoring and evaluating progress and results.

These findings reflect the challenge of working with diversity. While diversity broadens the resource pool of ideas, perspectives, knowledge and work styles, it can also reduce team cohesion, complicate communication and heighten conflict. Recent research from Jehn, et al. suggests that shared values that are related to the task or the work to be carried out can reduce the potential for conflicts in diverse groups. These shared values, which are often found in mission-based organizations such as the Centers, provide a foundation from which members can engage in *“the difficult and conflictual process that may lead to innovative performance”* (Jehn, et al., forthcoming: 37).

The action research and collaborative inquiry approaches to organizational change focuses on joint inquiry and learning between internal and external change agents. These approaches are usually more fluid and iterative than organizational development approaches to diversity. Moreover, action research and collaborative inquiry usually include the following phases:

- 1) Entry and set-up;
- 2) Data collection and inquiry;
- 3) Analysis;
- 4) Feedback and action planning;
- 5) Implementation and experimentation;
- 6) Monitoring and evaluation; and
- 7) Learning, adaptation and further experimentation.

Some of the strengths of action research and collaborative inquiry approaches to diversity are that they involve the underlying:

- ❖ It usually has many stakeholders;
- ❖ It helps strengthen the internal capacity to sustain change;
- ❖ It promotes organizational communication process through organizational dialogues;
- ❖ It successively generates less resistance;
- ❖ It also integrates the expertise of internal and external change agents.

Diversity initiatives require a multilevel approach that addresses different types of organizational change: structural change, cultural change and behavioral change. Finally, based on our review of the literature and organizations’ experiences, we have distilled 13 conditions for success for adversity initiative. (As described by Deborah Merrill-Sands, Evangelina Holvino and James Cumming, Working with Diversity: A framework for action, 2000).

- ❖ Work from an inclusive definition of diversity.
- ❖ Develop a strategic vision and plan with clear objectives.

- ❖ Align the initiative to the core work of the organization and its strategic goals.
- ❖ Engage many forces and people to create a broad sense of ownership.
- ❖ Have clear leadership and involvement of senior management in the change process and identifies internal champions with explicit responsibilities for implementation.
- ❖ Pay attention to internal and external factors (such as external pressure groups or budgetary conditions) that may support or hinder the initiative.
- ❖ Build the change strategy from a solid analysis of diversity issues in the organization.
- ❖ Provide freedom to pilot and experiment with changes.
- ❖ Convey the importance of engaging in a dynamic and systemic process, not a “*quick fix*” solution.
- ❖ Encourage an open climate that allows for the expression of passion, compassion and forgiveness throughout the change and learning process.
- ❖ Assign accountability across all levels and types of employees, including senior management.
- ❖ Ensure the competence of consultants engaged in designing and facilitating initiatives.
- ❖ Recognize, celebrate and connect “small wins” in order to aggregate small changes into a larger change process with more impact.

CONCLUSION:

With respect to international organizations, we add the following suggestions:

- 1) Make special efforts to identify and utilize in-country resources to provide demographic data, cultural and social science research, and other relevant diversity information; so that competitive individuals can come within the organization to enhance its profit as well as its cultural diversity.
- 2) Partner local resources with external resources in order to develop the capacity of country nationals to work on organizational diversity and to ensure that external consultants understand and respond to the local context; and
- 3) Pay attention and respond to the national social context, but also accept responsibility for providing leadership in changing accepted patterns of social behavior, so that they are suitable in a multicultural and global environment.

“Firms that possess healthy multicultural environments will be much more likely to be able to respond to new pressures. Such firms will also be more likely to avoid the view that there is only one way to achieve success”.

(KOSSEK AND LOBEL, 1996:15)

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