



Managing Workplace Diversity: Challenges and Strategies

Shaveta Dhuppar

Assistant Professor S.D. College (Lahore), Ambala Cantt

E.mail.ID: shvetamahesh@gmail.com

Abstract

Workforce diversity is considered as one of the main challenges for human resource management in modern organizations. Despite its strategic importance, the majority of models in this field implicitly consider workforce as a generic and homogeneous category, and do not 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 in strategic human resource management (SHRM). The objective of this conceptual analysis is to identify challenges faced by HR team in a large organization and strategies to overcome this challenge. This paper identifies innovative strategies for managing workforce diversity in present scenario. The paper looks at how communication strategies, recruitment policy, training, conflict resolution skills, periodical feedback are used in managing workforce diversity.

Key Words: Workplace Diversity; Communication; Challenges; Strategies

Introduction

Changing workforce demographics have made workforce diversity management necessary for firms. Mismanaged diversity can be detrimental to the employee satisfaction and productivity. Workforce of any factory comprises people from different

countries. Within this diversity of national origins, there is an even diversity of cultures, religions languages and dialects, educational attainment, skills, values, ages, races, genders and other differentiating variables. Employees of organizations are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. As days go by, diversity is going to be an important issue for the HR manager for following reasons :

- The number of young workers in the workforce is increasing.
- More women are joining the workforce.
- The proportion of ethnic minorities in the total workforce is increasing.
- Workforce mobility is increasing.
- International careers and expatriates are becoming common.
- International experience is becoming a prerequisite for career progression to many top level managerial positions.
- Diversity exists when groups of people bring their own backgrounds and experiences to an organization or workplace.

It is because of these issues that this paper put together in a comprehensive way so as to let all the human resources, management, public and government leaders read and understand the importance of managing diversity at workplace.

What is Workplace Diversity



People from all walks of life come together in today's business world. Diversity in workplace means employees with varying characteristics including, but not limited to, religious and political beliefs, gender, ethnicity, education, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation and geographic location. A company that embraces diversity can broaden its skill base and become more competitive and innovative. Workforce diversity also brings with it a number of issues and challenges.

What are the Issues and Challenges faced by organizations

Discrimination occurs when someone is denied opportunities on the basis of a personal characteristic that has no bearing on job performance. Discrimination causes great harm and is illegal in most cases.

It's natural that tensions will arise among individuals in a diverse workforce, so it's important for employers to have diversity management policies in place. Most large organizations have taken steps to promote diversity awareness and understanding. These **diversity initiatives** contribute to a positive work environment that is free from discrimination. Let's look at some of the specific issues that arise among the diverse groups in the workforce.

Communication

Communication barriers lead to problems in a company attempting to create a diverse workplace. When a U.S. company hires employees of other cultures whose first language is not English, employees and managers may experience difficulties communicating with one another. This can lead to misunderstandings and a decrease in productivity. For example, if a manager gives instructions about completing a certain task to an employee who fails to fully comprehend the instructions, the employee may make mistakes

if he tries to complete the task without receiving clarity. Sometimes it helps for companies to hire bilingual employees who can mediate and reduce language and communication barriers.

Opposition to Change

Although workplace diversity benefits an organization as a whole, some employees and managers may not react positively to changes made. Employees who oppose workforce diversity usually reject new ideas and make work environments more difficult. If the company doesn't handle opposition properly, workplace diversity initiatives may not provide the intended benefits to the company. To deal with opposition, companies should explain the reasons for diversity and what benefits changes in diversity bring to management and employees. Alleviating fears some people possess about workplace diversity may reduce much of the opposition.

Conflict

When prejudice, racism, discrimination and a lack of respect creep into a work environment, conflict among employees becomes inevitable. If not distinguished, such animosity in the workplace can turn explosive or even violent. Businesses who provide a diversified work environment and provide sufficient diversity training often reduce or eliminate such occurrences.

Lifestyle Acceptance

Though one's personal life should typically not affect their job performance, lifestyle acceptance is sometimes an issue in the workplace. Unfortunately, even though many employers now provide extended benefits to "alternative lifestyle partners," sometimes gay and lesbian workers experience disrespect and discrimination from coworkers. Such behavior



leads to an uncomfortable working atmosphere and poor productivity.

Ethnic And Cultural Differences

Sadly, some individuals harbor unfair prejudices against people of different colors, cultures, ethnicity or religion than their own. Such prejudice should not be tolerated in the workplace -- much less anywhere -- and should be dealt with in a firm and prompt manner. Firm company policies and appropriate training help build acceptance and respect among a well-diversified employee body.

Gender

One the oldest and most common diversity issues in the workplace is the "men vs. women" topic. Over the years, a new element in the disputes over equal pay and opportunity is the transgender employee. Some corporations have trouble dealing with the fact that a man in women's clothing or a woman in the stages of "becoming a man" may perform equally as well on the job done as those in traditional gender roles.

Harassment

Harassment can sometimes be an issue in a diversified work environment, but should absolutely never be tolerated. Recognizing harassment is key in preventing and eliminating discrimination from the workplace. Even the slightest comment made in jest can be considered harassment if any -- even remotely vague -- any racial, sexual or discriminatory connotation is made. For example, "I love Asian women" or "We should have hired a man."

Generation Gaps

In larger diversified corporations, staffs are often made up of workers who range in age from teenagers to senior citizens. Inevitably,

generation gaps can become an issue and the age differences can trigger "cliques" and separation of the company as a unit. Bridging the gap between multiple generations of workers can sometimes become an issue for employers attempting to establish teamwork.

Disabilities

Unfortunately, workers who are mentally or physically handicapped sometimes encounter discriminatory behavior from insensitive coworkers. In some cases, employers innocently overlook handicapped workers needs, such as ramps or special needs equipment. Creating a fair and comfortable work environment for disabled employees is important in a diversified workplace.

Consistency

Diversity training and practices are not just a course or exam that employees take. Consistency and a daily practice of company behavior policies is essential in molding a positive and productive workplace.

What are the Strategies to effectively manage diversity

Diversity management is the strategy of using best practices with proven results to find and create a diverse and inclusive workplace. Successful strategies link diversity progress directly to business results. Best practices include effective use of communication strategies, recruitment policy, training, conflict resolution skills, periodical feedback for managing workplace diversity.

The Hiring Process

Building diversity into the hiring process is an important component of a strategic management plan. A company's hiring policy should incorporate federal Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines. This is a starting point for ensuring that hiring procedures effectively



encourage a diverse applicant pool. Going above and beyond federal guidelines is an effective strategy for building diversity. Such a strategy can include soliciting cultural organizations for potential applicants, requesting referrals from existing employees and recruiting on college campuses. Reflecting the diversity of the community in which your company operates is a fundamental goal of this hiring strategy.

Education

It's not sufficient to simply put up a few posters regarding diversity in the workplace or to update the employee manual. An effective strategy incorporates diversity training in the workplace. Before starting training, however, managers should meet and decide on key areas to focus on and discuss what they expect to achieve. There are many companies that provide speakers and corporate presentations on diversity, so businesses don't have to rely on their in-house Human Resources departments. Of course, training is just a part of the overall strategy, and points covered during the training should be reinforced in office policies and procedures. Mission statements and core values should also reflect a company's diversity strategy.

Planning and Implementation

Business managers, in order to effectively manage diversity, must be able to plan and execute a diversity plan. This involves mapping out a way to create an appreciation for diversity in all employees in your office. Several methods exist to help you address this issue. Plan a diversity retreat. Whether a weekend away or several day sessions with your staff and with a diversity expert to discuss the issue in a non-business setting. A diversity retreat also allows employees to get to know each other and develop an appreciation for each other outside of work. Appoint a diversity officer. Ideally, this person should work for the

company and volunteer for the task. As part of their duties, he or she should attend diversity seminars once or twice a year and keep the staff knowledgeable and open to diversity. An incentive for the diversity officer might be more paid vacation days or, if the company can afford it, a raise.

Conflict Resolution Skills

An essential tool to managing workplace diversity is the ability to handle conflict. Disagreements that arise because of cultural differences must be handled promptly and swiftly as to not decrease productivity in the workplace. Be objective. When investigating a disagreement, be fair, objective and factual in the process. Ask each party questions about what happened and take notes accordingly. Get to the bottom of the issue and, instead of placing all blame on one person, make sure each person knows the importance of accepting everyone and appreciating their role in the office.

Communication

Good communication is one of the best ways to manage diversity in the workplace. Encourage your employees to share concerns as they arise. Every employee should feel equally important to the company. Keep an open door policy. Be open with your employees so they feel comfortable coming to you with questions and concerns about issues, both non-work-related and work-related alike, such as diversity. Making yourself approachable will serve you well in handling conflict, and every employee will feel important. Another way to improve communication in the workplace is to assign employees to project-based groups to work on large tasks, increasing teamwork and helping employees understand each other. Diversify the teams and encourage each team member to work peacefully with one another. They will



find that amid their differences, each member brings a valuable addition to the team.

Start Awareness During Recruitment

A diverse recruiting panel sends a message to applicants that the company embraces differences in people. Interviewers can ask candidates if they worked in diverse environments previously, and they can recruit people from different backgrounds to ensure diverse workforces. They also can make the workplace comfortable for all groups. For example, a company can place parking spaces closer to the building's entrance for physically challenged employees. This type of activity sends the message that the company understands and cares about its employees.

Educate Managers

Like any other employee, managers can be prone to prejudgment. Provide diversity training to company managers and conduct awareness workshops annually. Additionally, educate business leaders on the legal implications of discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace. Managers must be careful in their interactions with employees because the organization could suffer repercussions from their actions.

Open Communication Lines

To foster an attitude of acceptance and understanding, some businesses hold meetings and sponsor social gatherings to create an atmosphere where workers are free to speak their mind and talk about the issues they face. In these meetings, workers have the opportunity to listen to and understand the views of their co-workers. Managers can start mentoring programs that help workers improve their performance and qualify for other opportunities within the company. A feedback system that provides constructive evaluation and resources for improvement is also

valuable. With constructive feedback, employees can understand their strengths and weaknesses, improve their performance and avoid mistakes.

Provide Equal Opportunities

Savvy managers encourage all employees to come forward with their ideas and input. They promote understanding and appreciation of specific talents by creating small mixed teams to take care of particular tasks. In this way, they can monitor each individual's progress and allow workers to volunteer for tasks they are confident of performing well. Equal treatment doesn't necessarily mean fair treatment. For example, some employees might not be proficient in the English language. While this factor doesn't affect their ability to perform their duties, complicated instructions in English can be problematical.

Periodical Feedback

Seek periodic feedback from staff and management in the form of a questionnaire or staff survey. Analyze and communicate the results to staff, identifying any progress made in staff satisfaction and highlight any diversity or conflict issues so that they can be addressed before they become unmanageable.

Conclusion

Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace to enjoy a competitive edge and enhance motivation of employees. Diversity management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to opportunities. Management tools in a diverse workforce should be used to educate everyone about diversity and its issues, including laws and regulations. Most workplaces are made up of diverse cultures, so organizations need to learn how to adapt to be successful. How organizations manage diversity from today forward will determine



the long-term success or failure in the global marketplace.

References

- [1.] Kreitz, P. A. (2008). Best practices for managing organizational diversity. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 34(2), 101-120.
- [2.] Wambui, T. W., Wangombe, J. G., Muthura, M. W., Kamau, A. W., & Jackson, S. M. Managing Workplace Diversity: A Kenyan Perspective.
- [3.] Wentling, R. M., & Palma-Rivas, N. (1997). Diversity in the workforce series report# 1: Diversity in the workforce: A literature review.
- [4.] Anderson, A. (2013). How to Manage Diversity in a Workplace. Demand Media, Hearst communication Inc
- [5.] Martin, G. C. (2014). The Effects Of Cultural Diversity In The Workplace. *Journal of Diversity Management (JDM)*, 9(2), 89-92.
- [6.] Prasad, P., & Mills, A. (1997). Understanding the dilemmas of managing workplace diversity. *Managing*
- [7.] *the organizational melting pot: Dilemmas of workplace diversity*, 1.
- [8.] Stockdale, M. S., & Crosby, F. J. (2004). *The psychology and management of workplace diversity*. Blackwell Publishing.
- [9.] Aswathappa K. Human Resource Management: Text and Cases: 6th Ed. He Mc Graw Hill companies
- [10.] Kossek, E. E., & Lobel, S. A. (Eds.). (1996). *Managing diversity: Human resource strategies for transforming the workplace*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Business
- [11.] Oyler, J. D., & Golden Pryor, M. (2009). Workplace diversity in the United States: the perspective of Peter Drucker. *Journal of Management History*, 15(4), 420-451.