Opportunities & Challenges of Managing a Diverse Workforce

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Introduction

Cultural Diversity has gained increased attention globally over the past few years. In spite of everything, the contact of equal employment opportunity & affirmative action programs on the work force of the nations are undeniable. Cross cultural diversity incorporates more than it seems at a glance. For leaders diversity presumes mainly cultural, racial, and gender differences, because these are the most visible distinctions between people. They required addressing the differing cultures, languages, ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, religious sects, abilities, classes, ages, and national origins of individuals in an institution, workplace, or community. This is why business leaders seek for cultural diversity management initiatives on regular basis to better serve their employees and external constituents while simultaneously enhancing productivity, effectiveness, and sustained competitiveness.

Diversity can be defined as a collection of individuals from different colors, castes, nationalities and culture working or living together as a single society. Diversity in the organizations has taken the place of fundamental part of management. An organization can be called diverse if it gives importance to and values the differences that are present among the people. Workplace diversity is built on the principles related to providing all the individuals equal opportunities for employment irrespective of where they belong from and which nationality they represent. The organizations should try to accommodate people with differences such as age, gender, cultural and linguistic background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, physical or intellectual ability, as well as, gender identity (Cummings & Worley, 2014). Organizations should try to inculcate different people in the organization and try making it

diverse. Diversity can also be defined in terms of the ways people are different from one another such as socio economic background, life experiences, educational background, marital status, personality, family responsibilities, as well as, religious beliefs (Moran, 2011).

Opportunities of Managing a Diverse Workforce

Workplace diversity may seem a simple idea, yet in incorporates a lot of things in it. Diversity not only involves the way that a person perceives himself, but also the way that he perceives others who are around him. Such difference in perceptions affects the way that he would interact with the other people around him. The management of an organization has to deal with a wide variety of issues that may arise due to the difference in perception. However, there are many benefits of having a diverse workforce in the organization (Cummings & Worley, 2014). There are many strategic advantages that are present if the organization values diversity and also appreciates a diverse workforce. Successful organizations have recognized the need for diversity in the organization. They have also recognized the need that exists in the organization to take immediate action and to be willing, as well as, ready to spend its resources in the management of diverse workforce present in the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

There are many opportunities and benefits of having a diverse workforce in the organization. Some of them are listed below.

i. Increased Adaptability

The organizations that have a diverse workforce in them have the ability to supply the organization with a wide variety of solutions to the problems that might exist in the sourcing, allocation of resources, as well as, in the sourcing in the organization. Employees who are from

various different backgrounds bring in individual experiences and talent to the organization.

They suggest ideas to the organization that are flexible in delivering to the demands of the

customers, as well as, adapt to the fluctuation that might exist in the market (Sheridan, 2014).

ii.   Broader Range of Services

When an organization is composed of a diverse workforce and when diversity is accepted

and appreciated in the organization, then there is a large chance that the organization will be able

to go global and to make its products and services available to international destinations (Moran,

2011). This can happen only if the there are people in the organization who have different

experience, skills and an understanding of the different cultures and languages that are present all

around the world. The organization will be able to reach to customers globally when it will have

a culturally diverse workforce working for it (Ronald, 2003).

iii.   A Wide Variety of Point of Views

When there are a wide variety of people working in an organization, then for every

different situation and problem in the organization, there is going to be a variety of point of

views. The varying pool of ideas, suggestions and feedback of the employees from various

cultural and ethnic backgrounds will provide the managers and the organization with a number of

experiences and ideas to choose from. The organization can choose one of the many strategies to

choose from the pool of ideas to meet the business needs and to solve different problems and

situations. This will also be really helpful in meeting the needs of the customers in a satisfactory

way and to please customers in the best possible manner (Ronald, 2003).

iv.   More Effective Execution

The organization that have a diverse workforce and the ones that encourage diversity inspire and motivate its employees to work to the highest of their capabilities (Sheridan, 2014). The strategies in the organization can be implemented and executed in the best possible manner. This will also be helpful for the organization to result in a higher productivity (Meilke, 2013). When all the employees in the organization are motivated to achieve their goals, then the goals of the organization will also be met in the best possible way which will be helpful for the organization financially, as well as, the employees will be able to remain motivated to work hard for the goals and missions of the organization. The organization will be able to yield higher productivity, as well as, will be able to yield a high return on investment (Sims, 2013).

v.   Increased Innovation & Creativity

When people belonging to different backgrounds work together, then the rate of innovation and creativity in the organization will also increase. A lot of new and innovative ideas will come from people of different cultures in accordance with their mental and cultural abilities and experiences. This will present the organization with a whole range of ideas to choose from in different situations. Organizations with a culturally and nationally diverse workforce will always have a certain edge over the organizations that do not support diversity in them (Hunnicutt, 2009).

Organizations should keep in mind that diversity can bring about a high competitive advantage for the organization. People from various groups, cultures and nationalities work together in the organization for a common goal which will lead to the organization taking an edge over the organizations that are not practically that diverse (Okoro, 2012). Diversity,

therefore, yields benefits for the organization and help in making it more productive and lively. Inclusion of people from various backgrounds will only b helpful for the organization in many different ways and will not be of any burden upon the organization (Meilke, 2013). Therefore, considering all the strategic advantages that an organization can achieve through the deployment of a culturally and nationally diverse workforce, all the organizations should openly accept this fact and should be open to such diversity which will only lead to an increase in the profits of the organization and in the achievement of new goals and objectives in the best possible manner (Sims, 2013). Organizations should, therefore, try to be as open as they can about including a diverse workforce in the organization to make the organization a better place, as well as, to achieve the missions and goals of the organization as best as they can (Okoro, 2012).

Challenges of Managing a Diverse Workforce

The organizations which are diverse with different people from different backgrounds often face issues related to diversity as well. The management at such organizations has mentioned that normally in such organizations, there are more of similarities among employees of diverse organizations than there are differences (Okoro, 2012). However, despite this fact of sharing of common attributes among employees, there are many differences that exist between employees from different backgrounds (Hunnicutt, 2009). People in the organization coming from different cultures and different values usually have different and distinct personalities and ideas with them. This set of ideas and other differences among the employees may lead to some conflicts in the organization. One of the major reasons behind the increased conflicts in the organization is the differences that exist between employees based on their cultural differences. There may also be many differences among the people of the workplace based on education,

gender, disabilities or even generations. The conflicts in an organization due to the presence of a diverse workforce can be of the following types (Klarsfeld, 2010).

i.   Conflicts Due to Generational Gap between Employees

There are many different cultural differences that might arise among the employees based on the generation gap that exist among the employees of the organization. A diverse workplace includes employees from varying generation groups that include millennial, people from generation X and Y, as well as, baby boomers (Sheridan, 2014). There are distinct characteristics and traits that are associated with the people from each generation. For instance, the employees who fall in the category of baby boomers tend to form a linkage between their personal identity and the professional life that they have including the kind of work that is done by them. Baby boomers are the generation which is considered to be very committed to their personal and professional goals (Hunnicutt, 2009). However, whenever they find a chance to find and join a new and better employer, they are not afraid of changing the employer. They are not afraid to take chances that might be helpful for them in their career growth and advancement. On the other hand, the people and employees who belong to Generation Y are found to be the ones who have in them a value for professional development. They are found to be tech savvy, as well as, they are value flexibility in the organization and are accustomed to diversity. Such differences between people in the same organization may result in various serious conflicts in the workplace that need the attention of the management (Klarsfeld, 2010).

ii. Personal Background

The personal background of a person in the organization largely affects how he will address different situations that are presented before him in the organization. Cultural differences in the workplace can also be caused by the places and regions where the employees have lived or are currently living (Okoro, 2012). There is a distinct difference between the people in an organization who come from large cities and the employees who come from small towns (Kirton & Greene, 2010). The way that these two classes look at the situations is very different from one another. There are some cities that are known for their fast speed and haste for work as compared to other small town where things are not that tough ad time might not be such an important factor for the people from such places. This will lead to a difference of opinion among employees of the organization and therefore, might be the cause of some serious conflicts at the workplace (Klarsfeld, 2010).

iii. Ethnicity

Another major cause of workplace conflict that has become quite common these days is the cultural differences that arise due to the differences among the employees based on the ethnicity or religious and social background of a person. National origin of ethnicity takes the place of prime importance when the language barriers and communication, as well as, the ways a business is conducted are different from other organizations. There are some affinity groups that have gained popularity in the past few years. These groups represent a certain nationality or ethnicity and provide assistance and help to the people belonging to the same group. There might arise such situations in the organization where things go out of hand and some conflicts arise in

the organization based on the ethnicity or nationality of a person. Such circumstances need to be taken into control by the management before things go out of control (Okoro, 2012).

iv. Recommendations

There are some conflicts that are bound to happen in organizations and diversity conflicts are one of them. There are some remedial measures and recommendations that the management of the organization should take into consideration so that the issues can be resolved there and then (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010).

v. Commitment

The organization and its management should make it a top priority to demonstrate that they have a firm commitment to workforce diversity. When there is a commitment coming from the top management including the founders and owners of the company, it passes down to all the members of the organization Kvantaliani & Klimina (2013). Demonstration of commitment to diversity in the workplace will make the employees believe in it and will also be really helpful for them in not engaging in any useless conflicts that might affect the organization and its reputation in any way. If the organizational leaders do not appreciate diversity and do not show any interest in it, then there is going to be chaos in the workplace irrespective of any way that the employees are disseminated or communicated about appreciating and respecting diversity. Such situation might result in perpetual conflict all through the organization (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010).

vi. Training

The protagonists of workplace diversity training are of the view that the employees of the organization need to be provided with proper training about appreciating and accepting diversity in the workplace (Sheridan, 2014). The employees need to be trained and taught that the only way to avoid getting into any diversity conflicts at the workplace is to embrace diversity and respect it. The proponents of diversity training are of the view that the employees should be trained beforehand when they are oriented into the organization about the policies that the organization has regarding the issue of diversity at the workplace. This will be really helpful in avoiding such circumstances that lead to serious conflicts in the organization. Employee diversity training is necessary in such organizations that consist of diverse workforces. This will be helpful for the management of such organizations and will also help in avoiding conflicts that might arise in the organization due to the diverse workforce working in the organization (Keys, Malnight & van der Graaf, 2009).

Practical Application in Business Organization

Business organizations are continuously growing global with every passing day. For instance organizations like Google, Southwest Airlines and Apple has escorted an increase in the heterogeneousity amongst employees and has encountered the amplified challenges of managing diverse workforce. Incorporating assorted people and their perspectives has become a most important apprehension for every multi-cultural and diverse organization. The consequences for not managing diversity would possibly pilot to lack of creativity, competencies, skills, and employee interests which will in due course increase employee turnover and lessen organizations' and individuals' performance to a great amount Kvantaliani & Klimina (2013).

These realistic implication leads to practical wisdom because it must be a vital resource that can be practiced daily by professionals. For instance Google has developed internal policies on the diversity management of their employees. More and more companies also require incorporating diversity implications and programs and policies. Some companies even require their employees to sign a document stating that they will apply their business conduct (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). Everyone is not in favor of the fact that corporate policies must decide ethical behavior. Some claim that ethical problems are better taken into account based on the fact that employees use their own critical thinking, rather than pre-established rules.

In an interview Larry Page mentions that; valuing diversity means making decisions based on merit, encouraging different perspectives, and challenging behaviors that undermine other cultural or gender groups. He further states that valuing diversity means developing attitudes, practices and procedures that provide genuine equality of treatment and opportunity for all employees, regardless of issues such as gender, religious belief, age, disability, sex or ethnic origin (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). Thus according to him valuing diversity means:

- Championing and progressing diversity, building a positive culture that harnesses diversity. Consistently challenging behavior/attitudes that undermine other cultural or gender groups.
- Proactively supporting a meritocracy
- Being fair and objective.
- Displaying sensitivity to the needs of individuals, using a broad range of interpersonal styles to suit the requirements of any situation, local environment or culture.
- Encouraging a full range of perspectives and assimilating these into business decisions.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that business organizations are continuously growing global with every passing day. This has escorted an increase in the heterogeneousity amongst employees and has amplified the challenge of firms to manage diverse workforce. This requires organizations to managing multicultural people effectively because failure to do so will lead to business failure. It also concludes that in order to maintain business competitiveness and to ensure sustainable development and efficiency of the business, organizations need to incorporate intercultural sensitivity competence, training and learning to avoid communication failures. Lexicon Airlines needs to analyze that incorporating assorted people and their perspectives has become a most important apprehension for every multi-cultural and diverse organization. And the consequences for not managing diversity would possibly pilot to lack of creativity, competencies, skills, and employee interests which will in due course increase employee turnover and lessen organizations' and individuals' performance to a great amount.

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