



WORKFORCE DIVERSITY: MEETING THE CHALLENGES HEAD ON

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ABSTRACT

Diversity means difference in all manner and form. The antonym to diversity would be uniformity. In the workplace, diversity refers to the composition of your workforce – people of dissimilar background, culture, experience, psychical and mental characteristics, etc. whereas uniformity would involve cloning Mr. One and Only – we all think the same; we all do the same; we all look the same how boring! Why is having a diverse workforce so important? And what can backfire if people are too different? This paper serves to remind people of the pros and cons to having a diverse workforce and provides five recommendations for recruiters and managers on how to manage one. Yes, having a diverse workforce may sound obvious, but it's not so straightforward to manage as some might think. Let's explore.

Key words: Diversity, Work place, Work force, Recruitment, Management.

INTRODUCTION

Culture refers to the beliefs, ideas, traditions and behaviors portrayed by certain communities and are passed from one generation to the other. Cultural diversity involves the changes that have taken place comparing what was deeply rooted in culture in ancient times and how it has been changing with time. Psychological behavior and processes are analyzed under biological bases and is known as the biological psychology. It can also be termed as behavioral neuroscience. On the other hand, the study of the nervous system is called neuroscience. The outcomes of an action always describe the character or the behavior of a person. In learning about mechanisms and functions, study needs to be carried on the changes that take place on the behaviors of people. Improved education has made it clear to different people the rights they have and what they have not know about their well beings. This has greatly led to the changes experienced in culture. This study will major on how girls and women have changed their psychological behaviors from the basic that governed cultural beliefs to what it is now. Through education and awareness among the girls and women in the society, there has been increasingly

experienced changes that influence the behavior of the people in the society, as women and girls being a part of them play a role.

Changes in the recent decades have been experienced in many fields including reproductive and care giving roles, education, work, personal relationships and health among others.

The colourful world we live in

Diversity today is a given and leaders can no longer ignore it. On the contrary, managers need to embrace diversity despite the difficulties of managing people with dissimilar need to embrace diversity despite the difficulties of managing people with dissimilar needs and backgrounds. In “Understand the importance of diversity”, Businessweek explains just why: due to “speedy air travel and now even speedier internet service” the world has become interconnected. In addition, trade agreements and the free flow of labor between countries have further facilitated the process. Although that sounds rather obvious, the implications or affects of globalization on businesses are still being dealt with and experienced. Here is a perfect illustration of just how colorful and complex today’s world is: “In the U.S. alone, the wide range of people involved in both the making and the consuming of products could include the Indian automotive engineer who is helping to take Ford to the next level; the African American statistician at a Silicon Valley startup; the 65-year-old disabled man who, instead of retiring, has just been promoted; the Gen Y child of immigrants from Central America who excels in Web marketing at Procter & Gamble; the gay woman who is the mother of two; and so on”. Although fictitious, the above example couldn’t be truer to reality More importantly, as the journalist later reports, “As consumers, they are all buying what your business sells-or ignoring it-depending on whether your company is as diverse as they are”. Is this true?

Taking into account only the gender composition of a workforce, recent findings in the special report from The Economist, confirms the argument that a company’s employee makeup should in fact represent their consumer audience: “A number of studies have shown that the presence of a critical mass of women in senior jobs is positively correlated with a company’s performance and possibly with higher profits. None of them has demonstrated a causal link but it is not implausible that companies will benefit from a more diverse workforce with a broader set of ideas. Many of their customers are probably female. In Europe and America women decide on 70-80% of all household purchases and strongly influence buying decisions even for items such as cars and computers that are generally seen as male preserves.”

Businesses today have to embrace diversity to be successful. Companies can no longer group consumers into broad categories – on the contrary, markets are now highly segmented, into various groups and sub-groups, and it’s a trend that will continue as marketers learn to practice precision targeting. To reemphasize the point, if companies wish to be profitable, they first need to understand the needs of such a disparate consumer population and second, they need to cater to each and every distinct group by tailoring their products and service accordingly. How they do that? It’s by hiring, basically, their consumers!

From an employer branding perspective, businesses will thus need to attract a diverse range of employees and similarly address a disparate range of employee needs, i.e. if they wish to serve today’s consumer population. The

only way to do that is by first understanding what those differences are and become sensitized to the needs, wishes and views of others. Yet as mentioned before, managing dissimilar people is complex and as the WSJ pointed out: conflicts, prejudices and battles between groups occur. Internal conflicts and power struggles – the “us versus them” scenario – will certainly hinder business progress and a company’s diversity initiative could certainly backfire. What’s the solution? First, one needs to fully understand the implication of diversity, before one learns to master it. Second, the challenge for management is to lead by example, by being open-minded, tolerant and understanding to all. Third, the test for HR is to create an atmosphere that encourages cultural diversity and simultaneously forges a common company culture or team spirit attitude, one that is essential for achieving the company’s business plan.

Pros to diversifying

1. Innovation: people from various backgrounds and cultures don’t think or work alike, thus it encourages more outside-the -box thinking that leads to inventions and discoveries.
2. Profitability: a diverse workforce knows how to market and sell products and services to a diverse consumer population; marketing is all about understanding the end-consumer and there is no better way of doing it than by recruiting the people you’re trying to sell to.
3. Talent pools: a wider selection of people is made available, i.e. the entire world should be your recruitment shopping basket. Why limit yourself by recruiting only those from a particular university, educational background, or career path? Be daring and venture out into the unknown – you will be surprised to find many talented and gifted people that will over-deliver and surprise you if given the right opportunity.
4. Multifirmity: a variety of people with different skills and experiences are able to specialize and address various service/product areas in your business; the all-round overachiever or corporate superhero is hard to come by and it’s probably best to recruit people who have different skills and strengths instead.

Cons to diversifying

1. Conflicts: people often feel confused, threatened or even annoyed by individuals with views and backgrounds very different from their own; constructive disagreements can become power struggles and create a bad political atmosphere that hinders project advancements.
2. Bureaucracy: decision-making can be delayed due to diverging views and opinions; thus, corporate decisions and actions take time.
3. Unproductivity: dissimilar cultural identities and values, or simply said when people lack things in common, could negatively affect the overall team spirit that is essential for reaching high-levels of productivity.
4. Disunity: everyone in the company might have a different opinion on the way business should be run and managed; thus, the company might have people doing their own thing, especially if there is no protocol and authority to ensure common practices.
5. Recommendations for employers to manage a diverse workforce
 - a) Recognize and welcome cultural differences.

- b) Adapt to new hires instead of enforcing the traditional corporate culture on them.
- c) Communicate and understand differences.
- d) Be attentive to verbal and nonverbal cues that might indicate or create tension.
- e) Evaluate how diversifying affected the company's performance in sales, efficiencies, and customers gained or lost.

An organization's success (and competitiveness) depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize the rewards that such a program can bring. Companies that encourage diversity in the workplace inspire all of their employees to perform to their highest ability. With a company-wide strategy in place, organizations can reap the benefits of higher productivity, profit, and return on investment (ROI). Moreover, a diversity program can enhance an organization's responsiveness to an increasingly diverse world of customers, increase the organization's ability to manage change, as well as expand the creativity of the organization.

Let us take an opportunity to renew our commitment towards promoting and protecting the world's cultural diversity, fostering dialogue and ensuring a sustainable planet for everyone.

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