Implications of Best Practices in Achieving Workforce Diversity

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Abstract: Rapid Internationalization and Globalization has enhanced the significance of workforce diversity. According to Clemons (2006), workforce diversity is creating and managing an environment which enables anyone from anywhere to do their best, regardless of their differences and similarities. Today organisation not only by simply better understanding the demographic of the marketplace that they serve, diversity in the workplace allows them to secure a competitive edge. As markets become increasingly global, it enables organisation to discover untapped opportunities in new customers and products or services. Diversity in the workplace gives HR professionals an opportunity to ensure a head start on identifying new trends by having a workforce which is representative of its customers and it acts as a key motivating factor for employee, reducing absenteeism and maximizing productivity levels by creating an inclusive environment that values diversity. This paper highlights on the importance of workforce diversity as well as opportunity and challenges human resource professionals experience in managing diversity. It further highlights that effective diversity management can be achieved through using appropriate practices like Promote Dialogue**,** Build Resilience Skills, Addressing Diversity in Every Phase of Talent Management, Create Ways for Like People to Connect, Make Diversity a Part of Brand Image as these practices will be vital in overcoming individual and group process problems while improving the triple bottom line. Thus, Diversity management has a place in human resource management and should be at the heart of human resource practices which will help the organization set and achieve reachable diversity goals.

Keywords: *Workforce, Diversity, Workplace, Inclusive Environment, Flexibility, Brand Image, Cross-Cultural Differences*

Introduction: The world around us changes each day. It's possible to interact with other people on the other side of the globe with just one tap on the screen. And it's possible to sell goods or services anyplace in the world or recruit people from another continent to work for you without an effort to even walking into your office.

But, there are areas which don't showcase the society we live and work in. Among such cases is workforce diversity, a business issue experienced by many companies, even the most advanced and developed ones. To make your presence in the modern world and to be viewed as an employer of choice, you need a diverse workforce.

Workforce diversity overall means bringing together of a variety of people to one workplace which comprises a multitude of beliefs, understandings, values, ways of viewing the world, and unique information. Workforce diversity has increasingly become a "hot and burning" issue in political, legal, corporate and educational fields. Every human resource manager has to take care in managing this diversity with a proper consciousness towards diversity management approach, having sufficient knowledge and competency to manage diversified workforce.

The most important asset of any organization is diversified workforce because the diversified workforce improves the quality of management's decisions, and provides innovative ideas and superior solutions to organizational problems and gives competitive advantage to the organization. Organisations that have effective diversity management reap to benefit through bottom line returns.

Diversified workforce should not be only treated as a means for generating economic benefits for an organization but should also pay attention towards the factors that promote diversity by understanding the complex dynamics of workplace diversity. And to understand the complex dynamics of workplace diversity organisational factors like regulatory structures, governmental agencies, lawmakers, courts, professional organizations, interest groups, and the general public must be considered.

The art of managing workforce diversity constitutes a great challenge to managers charged, since it has both positive and negative implications. The negative implications are usually acknowledged in terms of reduce social cohesion, lower organizational commitment, communication difficulties, relational conflicts and higher employee turnover due to employees perceived difference and adverse stereotypes about different employees (Azmat, Hartel & Fujimoto, 2013). Managers may also be challenged with losses in personnel and work productivity due to prejudice and discrimination, as well as complaints and legal actions against the organization (Devoe 1999).

Managing diversity effectively to the full utilization of the skills and potential of all employees can contribute to organizational success by enabling access to a changing marketplace by mirroring increasing diverse markets and improving organisation. Therefore, valuing diversity may become a source of competitive advantage, increase the quality of organizational life and ultimately be good for business.

Review of Literature:

Harold Andrew Patrick and Vincent Raj Kumar (2012), examines the potential barriers to workplace diversity and suggests strategies such as learning about cultural difference and the way business is conducted in the country where the overseas assignment is, training employees to be sensitive to cross-cultural differences, encouraging employees to accept overseas assignments, and offering foreign language training to enhance workplace diversity and inclusiveness. The study revealed that the most preferred strategies to increase inclusiveness in organizations were by learning about cultural difference. Simlin (2006), found that as the age increases, the perception of diversity openness decreases, and hence it is important to orient the senior employees also about the presence and need of diversity openness in organizations through training, workshops, group discussions, and so on. Hofstede (1994), stated that to create opportunities for collaboration, 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. Okoro and Washington (2012), believe innovation when build on a diverse workforce provides an opportunity for competitive advantage through improved decision-making. Gold et al (2010), describes that organizations face a number of challenges with regard to diversity because the main principle is that all employee will be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Hence, it is necessary that the process and operational systems which is based on those principles too in which can be accommodated by managing diversity. Ehimare & Ogaga-Oghene (2011), demonstrated that there is significant correlation between some of the diversity variables as well as individual diversity variables with the measures of organizational effectiveness. The study revealed that gender and ethnicity are negatively related to both employee productivity and performance bonus. Further it also revealed that gender, age and tenure diversities are positively correlated and are significantly related. Therefore, this study suggest for company executives to use good strategies to effectively manage workforce diversity. Cox and Blake (1991) view diversity as a business imperative and highlight that organisations should understand how they value diversity to establish a competitive edge over their competitors, an approach that may be appropriate to leaders of organizations who generally aim to increase the bottom line through reduced cost and turnover, enhanced profitability, and improved market value.(Urwin et al (2013), stated that internal benefits arise because a diverse workforce 'which includes a range of perspectives can improve creativity and problem-solving, resulting in better decisions', innovation, and greater flexibility. Ashok Chanda (2006) Concluded that there is a lack of awareness towards diversity management approach, the manager don't have sufficient knowledge and competency to manage diversified workforce. Kulin Patel and Anuradha Sriram (2010), Explored the role of managing diversified workforce in the case of mergers and acquisitions and said that the merger and acquisitions among the organization is just like a marriage which means that the compatibility among the employees of both the organizations having different cultures is most important for this the culture assessment of both the organizations is necessary.

Research Methodology

The present study is a descriptive study and secondary data was used to understand the workforce diversity opportunities and challenges in various organizations and various other areas through research papers and articles, magazines etc. Finally the solutions were developed in the form of best practices organisations can implement to enhance productivity and organisations effectiveness through full utilisation of potential employees.

Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the opportunities and challenges Human Resource Professionals experience in managing diversity

- Develop the best practices in achieving workforce diversity which will be applicable to all type of organisation irrespective of the nature and size the business functions.

Importance of Workforce Diversity:

In today's world, workforce diversity is globally perceived and it has become an interesting topic at workplace and market. Any organization that plans to be more dynamic and profitable will have an indefinite viewpoint and a basic duty to assure that workforce diversity to be part of everyday business and corporate practices (Byrnes, 1984). Understanding the effect of this workforce diversity on organizational has become very crucial in proper management of diversity at workplaces.

According to Kirton & Greene (2009) workforce diversity management is "the systematic and planned commitment on the part of organization to attract and retain employees from diverse demographic backgrounds". In simple words workforce diversity management is the ability of a manger to achieve success for an organization by making the best of use of the similarities and differences among employees in terms of cultural background, age, race, physical abilities and disabilities, ethnicity, gender, religion and personality.

Workforce diversity management is a process that is intended to foster and maintain a positive workplace environment. As organizations diversify geographically and the free movement of employee across national boundaries strengthens, the need to interact effectively with broader constituencies becomes critical. For example, as service becomes a greater part of nations' economies along with higher levels of international and national as well as increasing competition, competencies in cross-cultural management become crucial if organizations are able to understand how to serve and retain a customer base that is much more diverse and demanding than in the past. The ability to understand multiple perspectives (e.g., cultural) in interactions can contribute to efficiency, whereas the absence of this ability can diminish from it. In addition, technological advances also offer the possibility of working with people one may never meet and from different cultural backgrounds (Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2001).

If managed rightly, a diverse workforce can transform an organization into a competitive market strongly. However, if mismanaged, dissatisfaction may set in, conflict can become a norm, and high turnover rates may reduce the organization's talent, because acceptance of diversity is an ethically right behaviour as well as making good business sense.

In addition, Organisations can remain competitive only by recognizing the importance of diversity and respecting the diverse perspectives that come with talent born of different cultures, races, and genders. Accordingly, organisations should strive to possess a highly trained and skilled workforce that is capable of working efficiently because in the future organisations with the best workforce will be the ones that draw on the entire pool of available talent.

Thus, Workforce diversity management can be adapted to many different types of working environments and be integrated into many different types of management styles. Promoting recognition and acceptance of diversity among the employees can convert a hostile workplace environment into a welcoming environment where people freely communicate and support one another with any tasks associated with the job. In doing so, the implementation of a diversity management approach often makes it possible for productivity levels to increase dramatically.

Opportunities and Challenges Human Resource Professionals experience in managing diversity:

The key to diversity management depends on people-centred policies. While diversity management is an approach that revolves around employees, whereas the Human resource management (HRM) function is the custodian of the people management processes. These functions have considerable overlap. Firstly, both HRM and diversity management are mainly concerned with the contribution of the human resource function to business strategy. Secondly, both HRM (especially soft HRM) and diversity management are concerned with individual differences, the development and well- being of each and every individual (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern and Stiles 1997).

Using the human resource management toolkits for addressing inequality in recruitment, appraisal, advancement and reward can enhance equal employment opportunity by improving inclusiveness and enhancing creativity in a diverse workforce.

However, as the workplace becomes more diverse, organisations face numerous challenges in managing organisational diversity. HR personnel and hiring managers need to be conscious of the various challenges associated with diversity such as acceptance and respect, ethnic and cultural differences, gender equality, physical and mental disabilities, generation gaps, language and communication barriers so that it can be prevented and addressed.

Top management commitment coupled with HR manager's efforts, skills and knowledge is crucial for combating these challenges and meeting diversity goals. Diversity urges a type of organizational culture in which every employee is encouraged to grow and succeed irrespective of age, gender, race, nationality, religion, disability or other factors that are unrelated to performance (Kundu, 2004; Dessler, 2011).

Effective diversity management needs HR managers to build a culture that value and support diversity across the organization. Human resource managers must deliberately create a culture which will unify diverse employees under common value sets and thereby help in embracing diversity as an instrument for enriching organizational effectiveness and employee performance (Babalola & Marques, 2013).

Moreover, HR managers should make an effort to promote a working environment which will enhance the motivation, satisfaction and commitment of diverse people in the organisation. However, it is often said that diversity's effects can be positive, negative or neutral depending on how well it is managed by HR managers (Kossek et al., 2005; Gomez-Mejia, 2010). Therefore, a successful diversity management must address organizational culture change, to develop an environment where diversity is valued and cultivated.

Effective diversity management can be achieved through using appropriate practices, as these practices will be vital in overcoming individual and group process problems while improving the triple bottom line. Thus, effective human resource practices must focus on increasing organizational learning, flexibility, knowledge creation and the development of a work environment which is conducive to diversity management. Diversity management has a place in human resource management and should be at the heart of human resource practices which will help the organization set and achieve reachable diversity goals.

The Best Practices in Achieving Workforce Diversity:

Workforce diversity is achievable by businesses regardless of nature, size or budget. It can revolutionize the way business is done today the same way it did since the 1960s. Managing workforce diversity, however, shouldn't end with federal laws or with top management of corporations. There should be involvement in every level of leadership in a company.

Since everyone benefits in the success of a business, there must be a collective effort when it comes to leading in a diverse workforce. It should be made clear to every employee to take an open attitude to create and promote a diverse environment. This makes it possible to plant the beginnings of a successful business by adopting the best practices, so that organisations will be well on its way to building an inclusive workplace that draws on the strengths of all of its employees.

These best practices will help organization set and achieve reachable diversity goals.

1. Commitment to diversity starts at the top. Success in workforce diversity begins with an active and visible commitment by senior leaders, as it allows organisations to draw from the best talent regardless of personal demographics. Diversity strategies are doomed or severely limited without a sincere commitment from the top.

2. Promote Dialogue: Workplaces are occupied with people who have different backgrounds and perspectives, and many people play it safe by not discussing politics and events. Instead of being silent, encourage dialogue about those differences and promote inquisitiveness so that employees know they are valued, and that you expect them to value others no matter how divergent their views. Moreover, honest and open dialogue can be healthy for individuals and organizations, but must be built by safe, supportive environments for sensitive dialogue. Organisation should promote study circles, peace circles or roundtable discussions that can be used to implement productive dialogue on diversity.

3. Build Resilience Skills: Resilience is a set of skills we can all learn to deal with hardship so that we can achieve our goals, be happy, and succeed in life in spite of negative events and setbacks by helping us overcome crises, whether personal or in the news. Some people have resilience skills naturally in spades and others don't have them at all. Managers should bring in an expert that knows how to educate employees on resilience. This is a long-term gift you can give to your employees.

4. Addressing Diversity in Every Phase of Talent Management: Diversity and inclusion management shouldn't initiate and conclude with hiring. No matter how diverse your workforce is today, you'll have a difficult time retaining and benefiting from that diversity tomorrow if you don't continue to address both individual and collective differences throughout the entire employee lifecycle. After all, how likely is an employee to consider a long career at a company if he/she doesn't see anyone like his/herself in management positions? And how successful will your global workforce be if managers are unable to provide feedback in a style that complies with employees' cultural norms?

For these reasons and more, diversity and inclusion are subjects that need to extend beyond HR to the entire organization and be considered in every phase of talent management from recruiting and on-boarding to professional development, leadership training, performance management, feedback/measurement, workforce planning, and more.

5. Create Ways for Like People to Connect: While diversity may be all about celebrating and leveraging difference, no one wants to feel so unique that they're lonely from their peers and adrift in the workplace. Thus, it's your job to know that they don't. One way of doing so is by organizing employee resource and affinity groups essentially communities within corporations that allow people with similar backgrounds and experiences to connect.

Providing a place for networking, mentoring, and socializing, such groups increase employee engagement by demonstrating to individuals that people like themselves are not only finding success within the organisation but are willing to help them succeed as well. With tools like these at their disposal, employees are far more likely to feel part of a diverse and inclusive workforce. And when that's the case, employee turnover reduces and employee effort increases.

6. Make Diversity a Part of Your Brand Image: When it comes to diversity, it's not enough to simply walk the walk, but you also need to let the world know that your organization embraces difference and welcomes all, and the best way of doing so is by making diversity a part of your brand image.

For example, what feelings are aroused when you think of companies such as McDonald's, Marriott International and Hilton International? That is their brand image. Effective diversity management may

fascinate diverse customers who possess considerable buying power. That is why organisations spend a great deal of time and money on public relations to create a positive image for themselves and their products. A favourable image helps the organisations attract investors, customers, and employees. Being known as an organisation that values diversity can do miracles for an organisation image.

7. Educate Employees: Organisations should initiate of educating employees on the importance of diversity in the workplace. Learning about different cultural traditions and approaches to work will keep employees up to date with global events and international politics. Take the time to get to know your colleagues from different countries and backgrounds and also be open to travel opportunities, especially if you have the chance to visit an office or team overseas. Not only will you gain a greater sense of cultural appreciation and sensitivity, you're likely to make new friends by finding much common ground.

8. Create a workplace where different perspectives are valued and embraced: This can go a long way to strengthen productive business relationships. Whether you're in a junior role, a manager, or director, actively seeking advice, ideas, and expertise from your colleagues will improve communication and foster a more inclusive organisation culture. This inclusive culture will, in turn, help your organisation to retain diverse talent and make your workplace an attractive option for globally minded job seekers.

9. Set decisions on objective standards: Expect all employees of all backgrounds to meet required standards and perform to the best of their ability. Don't set different standards for different groups. Don't make excuses or allow employees to make excuses for shortcomings. Set all employment actions, including discipline, on specific, performance-related criteria. Always focus on job-related issues, not personal issues, when dealing with employees.

10. Encourage employees to work in diverse groups: Ensure that work teams reflect the diversity of your workplace. Diverse work teams let employees get to know and value one another as individuals. Diverse teams also expand the experiences and views of all the employees on the team and help them identify the strength of their combined talents and perspectives.

Conclusion: Workforce diversity represents both a challenge and an opportunity for business to succeed. A growing number of progressive organisations understand the need for valuing diversity in the workforce, so as to ensure proper utilization of human resources for the accomplishment of organisational goals. The extent to which managers recognize diversity and its potential advantages and disadvantages defines an organization's approach to managing the diversity. Organisation in this world of globalization would survive with workforce diversity because it is believed that organizations should put in place best practices to enhance workforce diversity. Finally, creating a diverse workforce takes time and even longer to reap the benefits. The management and human resource professionals must not lose focus and interest in creating a diverse workforce due to the lack of immediate returns but to implement the best practices on its way to build an inclusive workplace that draws on the strengths of all of its employees.

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