



Workplace diversity management in 21ST century organizations

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Abstract

Diversity in the concept of management is a strategy that is intended to foster and maintain a positive workplace environment. An effective diversity management program will promote recognition and respect for the individual differences found among a group of employees. The idea of this management approach is to encourage employees to be comfortable with diversity in the workplace and develop an appreciation for differences in race, gender, background, sexual orientation or any other factors that may not be shared by everyone working in the same area of the company. It is a universal fact that individuals differ; both inherited and external factor are responsible for this development. It is an important task for every manager and leader to understand individual differences and diversity and also integrate the individuals and the organization to provide a better working environment that gives job satisfaction as well as help achieve organizational goals. The report emphasizes on how individuals differ from each other in terms of values, personality and attitudes. It also reflects on diversity at workforce and its importance to create productive environment. This study is designed to help managers effectively manage diverse workforces. It provides a general definition for workplace diversity, discusses the benefits and challenges of managing diverse workplaces and individual differences, and presents effective strategies for managing diverse workforces. Most organizations in their own perspective, adopt diversity at their workplace or organisation to become more creative and open to change. Increasing and improving workplace diversity has become an important issue for management in the recent years due to the recognition of how the workplace is changing. Since managing diversity still remains a challenge in organisations, managers tend to learn managerial skills needed in a multicultural working environment and prepares themselves to teach others within their organizations to value cultural differences and treat all employees with dignity.

Keywords: diversity, workplace diversity and management

Introduction

The world as a whole is becoming increasingly connected, which creates both opportunities, and challenges, for individual development in organisations. Opportunities for access to information of all kinds, the ease of interactions across traditional boundaries, the sheer speed of developments, and ease of communications for individuals and for organisations, all combine to create a different and more complex world in which organisations, made up of individual and diverse human beings, seek to go about their business and achieve their goals.

Paradoxically, the very connectedness of the world as we know it today with its potential for becoming a global village and for universal understanding and cooperation, brings with it a heightened sense of differences between groups, cultures and traditions. Exposure to and awareness of individual and group differences are enhanced with the rapidly evolving technologies of information and communication. The increased capacity, speed, and ease of access to communication across diverse groups brings with it an increased potential for mutual understanding and tolerance. Yet the same technologies make it easier for diverse groups (some feeling marginalized and alienated from others) to assert their identities and strike at the heart of more powerful and dominant groups. Never has it been

more important for us to seek to understand, accommodate, and harness individual differences (often used as the basis for group attributions and stereotypes) we find in the people who comprise the political, public, commercial and voluntary organisations in society.

As the world becomes increasingly connected and individuals are better and/or more educated the balance of power between the individual and the employing organisation has changed. Formerly, confident and domineering large organisations could not only offer jobs or careers for life, they could also dictate how their employees behaved. In essence, it was largely a relationship of dependency and compliance on the part of the individual employee, resisted in places only by collective action but not always with satisfactory outcomes.

The world's increasing globalization requires more interaction among people from diverse backgrounds. People no longer live and work in an insular environment; they are now part of a worldwide economy competing within a global framework. For this reason, profit and non-profit organizations need to become more diversified to remain competitive. Maximizing and capitalizing on workplace diversity is an important issue for management.

Supervisors and managers need to recognize the ways in which the workplace is changing and evolving. Managing

diversity is a significant organizational challenge, so managerial skills must adapt to accommodate a multicultural work environment.

This study is designed to help managers effectively manage diverse workforces. It provides a general definition for workplace diversity, discusses the benefits and challenges of managing diverse workplaces and individual differences, and presents effective strategies for managing diverse workforces.

Statement of the Problem

This study is provoked by the gap left unfilled by a substantial number of research works that has been conducted on workplace diversity and its significance on the corporate culture. In recent years Diversity Management and workforce diversity have been substantial and as such have forced companies to embrace these concepts in their companies with the aim of increasing productivity and profit. This forced integration has created divergence and uncertainty in the workforce, as management is not skilled enough to control the concept of diversity management and its ethics, and so managers are finding it difficult to effectively practice diversity management, which in turn has become an albatross on their neck.

Managers find it difficult in knowing the factors that contribute to effective diversity management or the exact leadership tasks that can be achieved to effectively and efficiently deal with issues related to workplace diversity.

Purpose of the Study

The rationale behind this seminar work is to examine the different ways of dealing with work place diversity as well as to provide management with the necessary guidelines for effective diversity management.

Concept of Diversity

Diversity can be defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. (Esty *et al.* 2015)^[3].

Diversity refers to the experience of human differences and commonalities, an experience which is increasingly becoming relevant to people's daily lives in the 21st century. In order to be successful, all kinds of organizations (business, public administration, NGOs etc.) are obligated to confront the issues involving diversity internally, among management and staff, and externally in their environments (customers, suppliers, contractors etc.). The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies (Jack, 2015)^[6]. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual (Satus, 2013)^[13]. Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences (Micah, 2014)^[8]. It is extremely important to support and protect diversity by valuing individuals and groups free from prejudice, and by fostering a climate where equity and mutual respect are

intrinsic. Diversity therefore, means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. Clef (2019)^[1] opined that diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve:

- Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.
- Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own.
- Understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;
- Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;
- Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Diversity according to Clef (2019)^[1], includes knowing how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are present in other individuals and groups. These include but are not limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, and work experiences.

Diversity Management

The purpose of Diversity Management is to tap into the positive potential of diversity and transform this potential into a reality. Organizations are reassessing their structures and processes in the light of equal opportunity (Paulson, 2018)^[9]. Awareness of diversity and competence in its management are necessary prerequisites for success. Many business and other organizations have already developed diversity management programs with some success. Having originated in the US in the early 1980s, DM is to some extent already established in many organizations (George, 2019)^[5]. Also, in Europe organizations are learning to use diversity as an advantage. Valuing differences makes the difference for success!

Diversity Management is a young management discipline, which originated out of a maze of many different historical currents and social issues. In the USA, Diversity Management is still associated (rightly or wrongly) with "affirmative action" and "equal opportunity" in multi-cultural (ethnicity, race, gender, sexual preference, etc.) contexts (Philip, 2018)^[10]. In Europe the emphasis has been more on the management of language and national differences as well as equal opportunity for women (gender mainstreaming).

In Nigeria, there seems to be movement away from Equal Opportunity, which often, albeit sometimes unintentionally, leads to quotas and presupposes assimilation as the main adaptation principle, toward a more systematic, positive, organizational approach of diversity management, toward appreciation of diversity and the conscious striving toward a scientific as well as ethical and results-oriented approach (Ugoji, 2013)^[15]. This approach, however, is not easy to put into practice. Conflicts and social issues obviously cannot be overlooked as and contexts.

This complexity entails the fine tuning and nimble use of different tools for dealing with it, and for describing and assessing each unique diversity constellation of any particular organization. As a consequence, in spite of

difficulties in overcoming complexity, diversity management has to assume that people are able and willing to change themselves and their thinking, and thereby define and redefine diversity in a positive light.

Dimensions/Layers of Diversity Management

Kreitner's definition emphasizes on three crucial issues about diversity management: Diversity applies to all employees and do not only encompass certain range of differences but the entire spectrum of individual differences that makes people unique. Therefore diversity cannot be viewed as only racial or religious differentiation, but it is the combination of all differences. The concept of diversity defines differences among people and also their similarities. The act of managing diversity requires that these two aspects be dealt with and managed at the same time. Managers are therefore expected to integrate the collective mixture of similarities and differences between workers into the organization. As such, diversity can be described as having four layers (Kreitner, 2017:38):

1. **Personality:** This describes the stable set of characteristics that establishes a person's identity. There are many different types of personality traits that an individual can portray. These types of traits could be a person's action, the behavior they process and their attitude. Moreover, the personality traits could be classified into two types, namely positive personality trait and Negative trait.
2. **Internal dimensions:** These dimensions are characteristics that have a strong influence on people's perceptions, expectations and attitudes towards other people. These include factors such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, physical ability and race.
3. **External dimensions:** These dimensions are personal traits that we have a certain amount of control or influence over. They are factors such as income, personal and recreational habits, religion, education, work experience, appearance, marital status, and geographic location.
4. **Organizational dimensions:** These dimensions are relevant or significant to the organization itself. They include factors such as management status, Unit or division, work field, seniority, union affiliation and management status.

Currently affirmative action is used as a method of attaining a diversified and integrated workforce. Kreitner is of the view that (2017:40) "affirmative action is an artificial intervention aimed at giving management a chance to correct an imbalance, an injustice, a mistake or outright discrimination" and that it does not foster a need to change leadership's thinking about diversity management. Jeffery (2016:11-13) argues that although affirmative action and black economic empowerment is necessary, the private sector should be allowed to focus on wealth and economic opportunity creation rather than just giving jobs to the previously disadvantaged. A higher level of "diversity awareness" from affirmative action is known as valuing diversity. Valuing diversity emphasizes the awareness, recognition, understanding and appreciation of human differences. By valuing diversity, employees feel valued and accepted, and are recognized as a valuable resource that contributes directly an organization's overall success (Kreitner, 2016:41). Grobler (2013:49) states that for an

organization to value diversity it must first understand the differences between valuing diversity and employment equity. The fundamental difference is that employment equity is enforced by legislation. The management values diversity due to its desires to gain competitive advantage by using the talents of a diverse workforce.

The highest level of "diversity awareness" is the discipline of diversity management. It is the deliberate and focused creation of organizational changes that enable all employees to perform up to their maximum potential (Kreitner, 2015:42).

Achieving competitive advantage through the management of diversity has become an important managerial, and hence leadership, consideration (Thomas, 2016:17). It is therefore obvious that management discipline needs effective leadership in order for it to be successfully implemented. According to Kreitner (2015:551) leadership is defined as "a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals." Changing existing attitudes toward diversity in the workplace clearly involves more than just decisive leadership but also the cooperation of all employees as it affects their inter-personal relationships with each other. Therefore managers must exhibit leadership traits and move beyond the normal tasks of planning, organizing and control. Managing diversity is a business imperative, strategic priority and a competitive necessity (Mc Enrue, 2013:18-29). Daniel (2014:14) agrees with this viewpoint and adds that if diversity is not utilized as a tool it might become business' downfall.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Diversity in the Workplace

Diversity is beneficial to both associates and employers. Although associates are interdependent in the workplace, respecting individual differences can increase productivity. Diversity in the workplace can reduce lawsuits and increase marketing opportunities, recruitment, creativity, and business image (Esty *et al.* 2015) ^[3]. In an era when flexibility and creativity are keys to competitiveness, diversity is critical for an organization's success. Also, the consequences (loss of time and money) should not be overlooked.

The major advantages are outlined below:

1. **High level of Productivity:** Increasing productivity at the workplace has been one of the major challenges for managers and leaders and to the company in general. Due to the fact that every organisation has its own unique company structure and objectives, different strategies may be used to challenge or address the company in order to increase productivity. One of those strategies involves adopting workplace diversity and managing it effectively. When management takes the welfare of its workers at heart by means of offering them proper compensation, health care and employee appraisal, It enables workers to feels they belong to the company irrespective of their cultural background by remaining loyal and hardworking which helps to increase the company's productivity and profit.
2. **Exchange of varieties of ideas and Team work:** In recent times teamwork is increasingly advocated by businesses and organisations as a means of assuring better outcomes on tasks and also for the delivery of goods and services. A single person taking on multiple

- tasks cannot perform at the same pace as a team could; therefore each team member brings to the table different ideas and offers a unique perspective during problem solving to effectively arrive at the best solution at the shortest possible time.
3. Learning and growth: Diversity at the workplace creates an opportunity for employee's personal growth. When workers are being exposed to new cultures, ideas and perspectives, it can help each person to intellectually reach out and have a clearer insight of their place in the global environment and hence their own surroundings. The more time spent with culturally diverse co-workers can slowly break down the subconscious barriers of xenophobia and ethnocentrism, thereby encouraging workers to be more experienced members of the society. Effective
 4. Communication: Workplace diversity can immensely strengthen a company's relationship with some specific group of customers by making communication more effective. Customer service department is one of the areas where effective communication is crucial. A customer service personnel or representatives can be paired up with customers from their specific area or location, making the customer feel at home with the representative and thus with the company. For example some companies in the south-western part of the United States often prefer to hire customer service personnel's who are bi-lingual to deal with customers who speak Spanish in their native language.
 5. Diverse Experience: Employee and their co-workers that come from a diverse background bring to the table some amount of unique perceptions and experience during teamwork or group tasks. Pooling the diverse skills and knowledge of culturally distinct employees together can immensely benefit the company by strengthening the responsiveness and productivity of the team to adapt to the changing conditions. Every diverse culture has its own strengths and weaknesses, therefore in addition to their individuality, every diverse employee possesses a unique strengths and weaknesses that is derived from their culture. When each workers' unique trait is managed properly and effectively in the organization, it can leverage the strengths and complement its weaknesses to highly impact the workforce.

The disadvantages are outlined as follows

1. High Cost of Diversity Management: To increase job satisfaction, workplace diversity management could sometimes be very costly, when an organisation strives to effectively manage the diverse workforce, it undergoes mandatory diversity training during which supervisors, employees, and managers receive lessons on the best way to interact with employees and clients. In recent times, there are lots of Diversity management program available where companies could choose from, taking into account the size of the company and its employees. Some training programs require a high travelling and participation cost.
2. Discrimination: One significant disadvantages of working with a diverse workforce is discrimination in the part of both managers and employees. It can exist but hidden aspect of a poorly managed workplace. When a worker is being discriminated, it affects his

ability to perform well and it also affect the perception of equity and raises issues of litigation.

3. Communication issues: Workplace diversity can negatively impact communication in the company. It can place an obstacle in the way of effective communication, which can cause a decrease in productivity and dampen the cohesiveness among workers. Even though spending time with employees by getting to know them helps reduce and in some instances eradicate communication barriers during a long-term, co-workers orientation periods and an individual's first impressions can be difficult to control when culture clash.
4. Myriad Accommodation: Although the premise of workplace diversity is mutual respect, making way to accommodate each diverse worker's request can be burdensome of employers, which makes it difficult to manage diversity. Some employee work constraints such as race, religion, country of origin and gender can sometimes be overwhelming if the diversity in the organisation tends to be so much to the extent that the company has to employ a fulltime staff to keep track of accommodating the employees needs. For example, some Muslim employees may decide not to work on Fridays, as it is a special day for prayers. In such instances employers has to make provision for someone to take their shift when the need arises.
5. Incorporation issues: Social incorporation at the workplace cannot be influenced to the maximum degree. Forming exclusive social groups is often a natural process that cannot be controlled sometimes. Therefore, companies tend to experience some degree of informal divisions amongst their workers thereby creating conditions where diverse employees avoid having contact with each other during leisure times and when work is over. Although this scenario doesn't seem fundamentally wrong, it can reduce the effectiveness of knowledge sharing amongst teams and hence decreasing productivity. (Ruth Mayhew, 2013)

Barriers/Challenges of Diversity Management

There are challenges to managing a diverse work population. Managing diversity is more than simply acknowledging differences in people. It involves recognizing the value of differences, combating discrimination, and promoting inclusiveness. 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 2019) ^[2]. Negative attitudes and behaviors can be barriers to organizational diversity because they can harm working relationships and damage morale and work productivity (Esty *et al.* 2015) ^[3]. Negative attitudes and behaviors in the workplace include prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, which should never be used by management for hiring, retention, and termination practices (could lead to costly litigation).

Tools for Managing a Diverse Workforce

Managing diversity requires that managers should recognize certain skills that are vital for creating an effective and successful diverse workforce. Leaders and managers must understand that understanding discrimination and its consequences will always prevail in the organization.

Managers must recognize their own cultural preferences. They must see diversity as the differences among individuals and support the fact that each individual is unique in a special way. Moreover, managers must be ready to change the organizational culture when the need to do so arises and learn how to effectively manage the diverse workforce in order to be successful in the future (Kelli A. G, Mayra L, Allen W, and Karl K 2013). Unfortunately there is no single formula that a company could apply to be successful, therefore it depends on the ability for the manager to figure out what best suits the company based on teamwork and the dynamics of the workplace. Roosevelt (2015) ^[11] explains that diversity management involves a complete process needed for creating a working environment that involves everyone. When creating an effective and successful diverse workforce, Managers in the first instance must focus on personal awareness. Both employers and employees need to outline their personal prejudices. A one day session of training is not enough to change people's mind and behaviours, therefore organizations need to constantly develop, implement, and maintain ongoing training and awareness creation.

Diversity management entails much more than providing same opportunity for employment. Managers should realize that change occurs in a slow pace, but yet should continue to encourage change. Dealing with diversity also requires providing a secure environment for managers and workers to communicate, such environments includes social gatherings and business meetings where every member feels comfortable to be and creates a friendly atmosphere to speak freely as well as listen to others. Mentoring programs should be implemented to guide employees on how to access information. Constructive feedbacks should be given to the employees after they have learnt about their mistakes and when they are successful in implementing the lessons learnt to achieve success.

Conclusion

A diverse workforce is a reflection of a changing world and marketplace. Diverse work teams bring high value to organizations. Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity. Diversity management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to opportunities and challenges. 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.

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