MANAGING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

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Abstract: Workforce diversity is a function of the similarities and differences among employees. in such characteristics as age, gender, ethnic heritage, physical ability or disability, race and sexual orientation. Managing diversity entails enabling people to perform up to their maximum potential. Valuing diversity means putting an end to the assumption that everyone who is not a member of the dominant group must assimilate.

Diversity represents the multitude of individual differences that exists among people. Workforce diversity is a function of the similarities and differences among employees in such characteristics as age, gender, ethnic heritage, physical ability or disability, race and sexual orientation.

In present time, diversity in the workplace is being recognized as a benefit that will contribute to an organizations bottom line. Increased employee and customer satisfaction end up as increased productivity, all of which are measurable outcomes. Diversity goes beyond employment equity to nurturing an environment that values the differences and maximizes the potential of all employees, one that stimulates employee creativity and innovativeness.

Managing diversity entails enabling people to perform up to their maximum potential. It focuses on changing the organization's culture and infrastructure such that people provide the highest productivity possible. Effectively managing diversity can influence the organization's costs and employee attitudes, recruitment of human resources, sales and market share, creativity ani innovation, group problem solving and productivity.

In a diverse workforce, managers are compelled to recognize and manage the similarities and differences that exist among the people in the organization.

Employee's conceptions of work, expectations of rewards from the organization, and practices in relating to others are all influenced by diversity. Managers of diverse work groups need to understand how the social environment affects employees' beliefs about work, and they must have the communication skills to develop confidence and self-esteem in members of diverse work groups. Many people tend to stereotype others in organizations.[1] A stereotype is a generalization about a person or a group of persons based on certain characteristics or traits. Many managers fall into the trap of stereotyping workers as being like themselves and sharing the manager's orientation toward work, rewards, and relating to coworkers. However, if workers do not share those views, values, and beliefs, problems can arise. A second situation involving stereotyping occurs when managers stereotype workers according to some particular group such as age, gender, race, ethnic origin, or other characteristic. It is often easier for managers to group people based on easily identifiable characteristics, and treat these groups as "different." Managers who stereotype workers based on assumptions about the characteristics of their group tend to ignore individual differences which leads to rigid judgments about others that do not take into account the specific person and the current situation.

Stereotypes can lead to the even more dangerous process of prejudice toward others.

Prejudices are judgments about others that reinforce beliefs about superiority and inferiority; they can lead to an exaggerated assessment of the worth of one group and a

diminished assessment of the worth of others. [2] When people prejudge others, they make assumptions about the nature of the others that may or may not be true, and they manage accordingly. In other words, people build job descriptions, reward systems, performance appraisal systems, and management systems and policies that fit their stereotypes.

Management systems built on stereotypes and prejudices do not meet the needs of a diverse workforce. An incentive system may offer rewards that people do not value, job descriptions that do not fit the jobs and the people who do them, and performance evaluation systems that measure the wrong things. In addition, those who engage in prejudice and stereotyping fail to recognize employees distinctive individual talents, which often leads these employees to lose self-esteem and possibly have lower levels of job satisfaction and performance. Stereotypes can also become self-fulfilling prophecies. If we assume someone is incompetent and treat him or her that way, over time the employee may begin to share the same belief. This can lead to reduced productivity, lower creativity, and lower morale.

Managers caught in this counterproductive cycle can change. As a first step they must recognize that diversity exists in organizations.

Only then can they begin to manage it appropriately. Managers who do not recognize diversity may face an unhappy, disillusioned, and underutilized workforce.

The Value of Diversity

Valuing diversity and managing diversity require organizations to adopt a new way of thinking about differences among people. Valuing diversity strive to recognize the unique contribution every employee can make. The differences between managing diversity and valuing diversity are shown in Table 1[3]:

Table 1:

Valuing diversity	Managing diversity
Qualitative . Emphasizes the appreciation of differences and creating an environment in which everyone feels valued and accepted. Monitored by organizational surveys focused on attitudes and perceptions. Ethically driven. Moral and ethnical imperatives drive this culture change.	*Behavioral*. Emphasizes the building of specific skills and creating policies which get the best from every employee. Monitored by progress toward achieving goals and objectives. *Strategical driven*. Behaviors and policies are seen as contributing to organizational goals and objectives such as profit and productivity and are tied to reward and results.
Idealistic. Everyone benefits. Everyone feels valued and accepted in an inclusive environment.	*Pragmatic*. The organization benefits: morale, profit, and productivity increase.
Diversity model. Assumes that groups will retain their own characteristics and shape the organization as well as be shaped by it, creating a common set of values.	*Synergy model*. Assumes that diverse groups will create new ways of working together effectively in a plurastic environment.
Opens attitudes, minds, and the culture. Afects attitudes of employees.	*Opens the system*. Affects managerial practices and policies.
Resistance due to fear of change, discomfort with differences, and desire for return to "good old days".	*Resistance due* to denial of demografic realities, the need for alternative approaches, and/or benefits associated with change; and the difficulty in learning new skills, altering existing systems, and/or finding time to work toward synergistic solutions.

Adapted from: R. Kreitner and A. Kinicki, *Organizational Behavior*, IRWIN Inc., 1995: Source: L. Gardenswartz and A. Rowe, *Managing Diversity: A Complet Desk Reference and Planning Guide* (Homewood, IL: Business One Irwin, 1993), p. 405.

The issue of workforce diversity has become increasingly important in the last few years as employees, managers, consultants, and the government finally realized that the composition of the workforce affects organizational productivity. Rather than trying to assimilate those who are different into a single organizational culture, the current view is that organizations need to celebrate the differences and utilize the variety of talents, perspectives, and backgrounds of all employees.

Valuing diversity means putting an end to the assumption that everyone who is not a member of the dominant group must assimilate. This is not easily accomplished in most organizations. Truly valuing diversity is not merely giving lip service to an ideal, putting up with a necessary evil, promoting a level of tolerance for those who are different, or tapping into the latest fad. It is an opportunity to develop and utilize all of the human resources available to the organization for the benefit of the workers as well as the organization.

Valuing diversity is not just the right thing to do for workers, it is the right thing to do for the organization, financially and economically. One of the most important benefits of diversity is the richness of ideas and perspectives that it makes available to the

organization. Rather than relying on one homogeneous dominant group for new ideas and alternative solutions to increasingly complex problems, companies that value diversity have access to more perspectives of a problem. These fresh perspectives may lead to development of new products, opening of new markets, or improving service to existing customers.

Overall, the organization wins when it truly values diversity. A worker whom the organization values is more creative and productive. Valued workers in diverse organizations experience less interpersonal conflict because the employees understand each other. When employees of different cultural groups, backgrounds, and values understand each other, they have a greater sense of teamwork, stronger identification with the team, and deeper commitment to the organization and its goals.

Assimilation is the process through which a minority group learns the ways of the majority group. In organizations this entails hiring people from diverse backgrounds and attempting to mold them to fit the existing organizational culture. One way that companies attempt to make people fit in is by requiring that employees speak only one language. By universally applying the values of the majority group throughout the organization, assimilation tends to perpetuate false stereotypes and prejudices. Workers who are different are expected to meet the standards for dominant group members.

Strategies for managing diversity

The most useful initiatives and programs to better understand organizational response to workforce diversity are [4]:
- The major barriers that have inhibited the employment, development, retention, and promotion of diverse groups in the workplace can be categorized into two types. The first type of barrier is organizational in nature and comes from the workplace environment. The second type of barrier is individual and comes from the employees themselves.
- The six organizational barriers which are most likely to inhibit the advancement of diverse groups in the workplace are: negative attitudes and discomfort toward people who are different, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, racism, and bias.
- The six individual barriers that are most likely to inhibit the advancement of diverse groups in the workplace are: poor career planning, inadequate skill preparation, lack of organizational political savvy, lack of proper education, low self-esteem, and poor self-image.
- Diversity should be defined in the broadest sense in order to include all the different characteristics that make one individual different from another. Also, another reason for making the definition all-inclusive is that it recognizes everyone as part of the diversity that should be valued.
- The six factors most likely to influence diversity in the workplace are demographic changes, global marketplace, economics, comfort with being different, a diverse customer base, and Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action programs.
- The four major reasons that organizations manage diversity are: to improve productivity and remain competitive, to form better work relationships among employees, to enhance social responsibility, and to address legal concerns.
- The six best strategies for managing diversity are: training and education programs, organizational policies that mandate fairness and equity for all employees, mentoring programs, performance appraisal systems that are nondiscriminatory, outreach programs, and career development programs.

➢ Other important recommendations for managing diversity are to obtain top management support, to integrate diversity into all company functions, to use a combination of strategies, and to create a corporate culture that supports diversity.

➢ Diversity training needs to begin with increasing awareness of what the concept of diversity is and why it is important. The skill training, then, should provide the specific information needed to create behavior changes that are required to effectively manage and work within a diverse workforce. Then, application strategies and support needs to be provided so that diversity awareness and skills can be applied to improving work performance.

➢ The major goals of diversity training are to increase organizational effectiveness and personal effectiveness.

➢ The ten components of an effective diversity training program are: commitment and support from top management, inclusion as part of the organizational strategic plan, meeting the specific needs of the organization, utilizing qualified trainers, combining with other diversity initiatives, mandatory attendance, creating inclusive programs, providing trust and confidentiality, requiring accountability, and conducting evaluation.

➢ The future trends related to diversity include the following: Society will become more diverse and, therefore, the workforce and the marketplace will become more diverse; there will be more globalization of corporations, which will lead to a more global workforce, marketplace, and economy; diverse work teams will be a reality in organizations; diversity will become more of a business concern than a social concern and be more closely linked to competitive strategies; diverse populations will make more money and spend more money and this increase in wealth will empower diversity; senior managers will become more involved in diversity issues because they will realize that the diverse workforce needs to be better utilized in order to remain competitive; more managers will face the challenge of dealing with backlash; and diversity training will be integrated more with other types of training.

Reference Notes:

[1] G. Moorhead, R.W. Griffin, *Organizational behavior – Managing people and organizations*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 1998, p. 54
[2] G. Moorhead, R.W. Griffin, *Organizational behavior – Managing people and organizations*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 1998, p. 54
[3] R. Kreitner and A. Kinicki, *Organizational Behavior*, IRWIN Inc., 1995
[3] Diversity in the Workforce Series Report #2: Current Status and Future Trends of Diversity Initiatives in the Workplace: Diversity Experts' Perspectives (MDS-1082) R. M. Wentling, N. Palma-Rivas

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1. G. Johns, *Comportament organizațional*, Editura Economică, Bucureşti, 1998
2. R. Kreitner, A. Kinicki, *Organizational Behavior*, IRWIN Inc., 1995
3. G. Moorhead, R.W. Griffin, *Organizational behavior – Managing people and organizations*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 1998
4. L.J. Mullins, *Management and Organizational Behaviour*, Pitman Publishing, Great Britain, 1993
5. M. Vlăsceanu, *Organizații şi comportament organizațional*, Editura

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6.   R. M. Wentling, N. Palma-Rivas , Diversity in the Workforce Series Report #2: Current Status and Future Trends of Diversity Initiatives in the Workplace: Diversity Experts' Perspectives (MDS-1082)