

**DIVERSITY IN WORKPLACES****AARTHI C SABARINATHAN**Member of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India
reachartinow@gmail.com**ABSTRACT:**

The globalized era has changed the demographic component of the modern workplace. The workplace today consists of people from various backgrounds be it race, gender, ethnicity, religion or gender orientation. A heterogeneous workforce has its challenges and the more diverse it is the more dynamic. So it is imperative for management to ensure that not only the policies are conducive and acceptable to all types of people but also that the employees appreciate the need for understanding and respecting the differences. Here there is an emphasis on preventing discrimination and ensuring that there is equitable treatment of all employees and no one is discriminated on account of his/her diverse background. This paper explores the paradoxical nature and the paramount importance of managing workplace diversity to create a harmonious and successful organization.

Keywords:

Diversity, gender, race, ethnicity, equality, amicable, policies, organization, discrimination, prevention, management, commitment, implementation, globalization, respect, people, employees, inclusion, harassment, laws, gender, society, support, social, fair, groups, international, corporate, human resources, conflict, harmony, productivity.

INTRODUCTION:

In today's era of globalization, industries abound paving way for more and more job creation. Technology has shrunk the world into a global village wherein there are hardly any barriers in international trade and commerce. Groups organized around ethnicity and races are reshaping societies by challenging established systems and social customs. The raising voices of demands from anti-racist groups, women associations, and disability movements have been finding support among the masses. The increasing integration of these social groups has started making an impact on workplace environments around the world. This situation is a boon to both the corporate entities and the job seekers as they both now have a wide pool of choice from which they can select the best ones.

With rapid industrialization, thanks to advanced technology and growing volumes of global trade, more and more multinational companies are on the expansion mode. Most people have little choice about whether to work or not; once they join a workplace they hardly have the option to choose their colleagues. The interaction in work places is mostly related to work, rules and following regulations. A workplace is not a club where people can choose whether or not to interact with other people. The compulsion of job ultimately calls for interaction among the employees and there is no way to avoid it. At this juncture the similarities in backgrounds act as a magnetic attraction whereas the diversities generally tend to create a repulsive effect. People of the same gender, same age and ethnicity tend to work cohesively ignoring the ones whose backgrounds are diverse from themselves. This often creates discrimination in the conduct of work affecting one or more employees adversely owing to their diverse background.

Today's workforces are no longer people speaking the same language or practicing the same culture. They are from diverse backgrounds be it their language or ethnicity or religion or region or cultural beliefs or gender orientation. Managing the changing demographics of the workplace



has become vital for competitive survival. The term “Equal Employment Opportunity” is gaining more momentum than ever before. Taking affirmative action to manage the implications of workplace diversity is seen as a vital factor for boosting employee morale, reducing attrition and striving for successful employee engagement.

MEANING OF “DIVERSITY”

“Diversity” means variety, assortment, mixture, multiplicity; the condition of being composed of differing elements or qualities. “Diversity in the workplace” means that each individual is unique and it is important to recognize and respect individual differences. These differences could be along the dimensions of race, gender, sexual –orientation, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, physical abilities, political beliefs and other ideologies.

Employees working in an organization must learn to accept individual differences and respect diverse preferences. Otherwise frequent quarrels and conflicts may arise, disturbing the workplace equilibrium, and ultimately impact productivity in an adverse manner.

Today, public and private sector employers are poised to create productive workforces that are representative of not only the regional and local population but also the global population. Managing diversity refers to the ability of the top management to develop strategies and programs to accommodate diversity in workplaces and harness the diverse human resources to establish a motivated and amicable workforce.

How to address Diversity Issues?

Diversities in the workforce brings in interpersonal conflicts which if left unaddressed can raise to great proportions and may even result in the shutting down of the organization. Employing a homogenous workforce is far away from the reality; it is important to focus how the diversity challenges can be overcome and instead used as strength for the organization. The commitment of the top management to end and prevent discrimination based on diversity is the first and foremost important step in addressing employee issues.

Following are some of the key points relevant to address diversity issues even before they crop up.

- 1) Commitment from the management in the form of policies and procedures that aim at equal opportunity for all.
- 2) Human resource policies shall lay emphasis on prevention of discrimination and disciplinary action for diversity harassment.
- 3) Alignment of the organizational policies with the laws of the land to ensure fair labour practices and policies.
- 4) Sensitization programs to be part of employee induction and training so that the message of respect for diversity is conveyed to employees at all levels.
- 5) Workplace ergonomics to be arranged to accommodate diversity. E.g., special desk and chairs to meet the needs of physically disabled employees, separate washrooms for trans-people.
- 6) Boards and posters affirming “No discrimination”, “Equal opportunity employment” “Harassment free work spaces” to be displayed at conspicuous places in the factory, office, shop, showroom and other work places.
- 7) Supervisors and leaders at all levels to undergo special training on “diversity handling” so that they appreciate and accept the need for a diverse workplace.



- 8) Committees for handling diversity harassment cases to be formed in each office and employees shall be encouraged to approach them without fear of any repercussion.
- 9) Hotline numbers, and email ids to be displayed prominently in the work place for addressing issues relating to discrimination.
- 10) Frequent awareness programs on the need for embracing diversity to be part of the human resource development plan, fostering an inclusive and respectful culture.
- 11) Organizing public programs like walkathon, cyclotron, marathon and cultural events to espouse the cause of the marginal sections of society, help in affirmation of the organizational commitment to protect and encourage diversity.
- 12) Senior leaders to be appointed as champions of diversity and their appraisal linked to diversity promotion activities.
- 13) Set diversity goals, celebrate milestones and make people accountable, thus creating a climate of serious commitment to diversity management.

Diversity management has sadly received little attention to date although diversity has become a buzzword. But both “diversity management” and diversity are not one and the same. Diversity management has the potential to enhance the quality of decision-making and involves equal participation of all the parties concerned. Top management must have a passion for embracing and practicing diversity and it should be reflected appropriately in the corporate policies. Leaders need to frame a “Strategic Diversity Management process” for their organization, taking into account the various types of diversities involved among their workforce. Recruitment and termination policies must be updated with discrimination free clauses and also provide forums for addressing grievances.

The human resource approach must emphasize on the interplay between people and organization, and recognize cultural diversity that practice “inclusion” of every employee irrespective of his/her background. In other words, employees should not be discriminated based on their gender, age, and linguistic, regional and national basis nor should they be alienated for their religious beliefs or personal political affiliations, unless any of these impairs the performance of their organizational duties. To remove any bias and foster inclusion it is important that all the employees feel equally valued; they are paid in accordance with their performance and not discriminated based on age or gender.

Generally recruitment of women, physically disabled and sexually differently oriented people to the senior management positions is seen as a challenge. Diversity policies propose that when such employees show superior performance they should not be discriminated in recognition of awards and promotions merely because of their diverse backgrounds. It has been time and again proved that a person's race or ethnicity or beliefs does not have an impact on their organizational performance; that being the case discrimination based on diversities seem to be unfair and hence the need for elimination of such unfair workforce practices. Organizations today focus on assimilating qualified, talented, under-represented people into the organization.

The Indian Scenario:

Indian corporate houses still lag behind when it comes to managing diversity issues. According to the United Nations, women in India represent only 29 percent of the labour force and are not



well represented in most sectors including business. Numerous reports suggest that the ratio of women opting for science, technology, engineering and mechanical streams in their careers is significantly lower. Further women hold a mere 3% of positions in the top management. One 2018 report from the World Economic Forum puts India in the 142nd position among 149 countries on the economic participation and opportunity factor, that forms part of the gender gap calculation. India is 202 years away from bridging the global gender gap. According to a 2015 study, increasing women's participation in the organized sector by as little as 10% could add USD700 billion to the Indian GDP by 2025. A 2017 report by the Ministry of Statistics & Program implementation indicates that women in urban area with a graduate or higher degree earn 24% lesser than their male counterparts.

A 2017 white paper by consulting firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers titled "Re-imagining leadership: Steering India's workforce in 2030" has identified management of multidimensional diversity as one of the top six critical capabilities that will act as a differential factor for identifying successful leaders in India in 2030. Thanks to the emerging globalism, many Indian corporate have started understanding the importance of encouraging diversity and are taking steps in this direction. Although the arms of the giant multinational corporations are leading the trend, Indian companies too have joined the fray recently. Conglomerates such as Mahindra & Mahindra, Genpact, Tata, Birla, Vedanta etc. have started rolling out discrimination free hiring and firing policies. Special drives for women, physically disabled are being given priority in recruitment. Companies have started laying down concrete plans to utilize under-represented groups and much work is on the way between the HR and leadership teams to translate the goals into action points. These efforts are already paying off as seen from a recent survey that reports the number of women working incorporate India have risen from 98 lakhs in 2013 to 196 lakhs in 2017.

CONCLUSION

A happy workplace is a productive workplace. To withstand the acute competition and sustain, there is a need to employ the best of people which is possible only by the recruitment of highly skilled workforce. In this process, hiring of a heterogeneous population becomes a necessity. So it is vital to ensure that people hired by the company are not discriminated based on their language, age, gender complexion, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, socio-economic status and ideologies. Management of workplace diversity is indeed a challenge. . Employees are the most important resources of any concern. Employee engagement is a sine qua non for the success of any organization Organizational commitment towards prevention of discrimination and embracing diversity would result in positive employee engagement. Policies on encouraging discrimination, promoting equal opportunity for all employees and respecting diversities will go a long way in attracting and retaining robust workforces which in turn will establish a strong organization that can adapt to the vagaries of the dynamic internal and external environment.

It is heartening to see the changes in the world during the last decade on diversity and inclusion. There is a big social change happening all around that empathize with the marginalized communities and appreciates the need for including them in the mainstream. The future seems to be bright for the under- represented groups, as there is an increasing awareness about diversity inclusion and respect for people irrespective of their other dimensions or background. In the days to come, more and more employers will be accepting and accommodating diversities in the



workplace putting an end to the bottlenecks faced by certain sections of society hitherto ignored by prejudice.

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