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MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AT WORK PLACE

Dr. Mamta Malhotra¹

¹ Assistant Professor

Postgraduate Govt. College for Girls, Sector 42, Chandigarh

Abstract

Modern technological advances in transportation have shrunk the globe to such an extent that it is no longer a problem to move to any part of the world be it for entertainment, studies and especially work. Employee mobility and the trend of boundary-less organizations has been among the macro economic factors that contributed to the increased challenges that today's corporate leadership is exposed with in the field of managing the cultural diversity in their facilities and offices located across the globe . Workplaces today are becoming increasingly diverse with employees of different genders, races, cultures, ethnic origins, and lifestyles. There have been so many changes in the cultural make-up of organizations that it has become imperative for leaders and supervisors to understand cultural diversity and how it can affect their organization. Leaders of the new millennium are being faced with numerous challenges and issue of the corporate environment that make it critical for managers to effectively manage the cultural diversity at various workstations and business locations. In order to lead the corporate in an effective manner while satisfying the needs and cultural demands of each employee, a leader has to be competitive and alarmed to see the long term impacts of any kind of change process initiated in the workplace. This research paper aims to reflect as to what is diversity management, why it is important for organizations to embrace the diversity at the workplace, and most importantly the role of leaders in successfully managing increased cultural diversity within the workforce.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Globalization, Leadership, Challenges, Workplace Discrimination, Workforce.



Introduction

The trend of globalization and its consequential convergence-divergence in the world of business has brought significant changes in the universal practices and management of human resource. Globalization has been the root cause of major reforms in the leadership styles and approaches that the corporate world has seen so far and is even exploring around. Every day sun rises with new challenges of managing cultural diversity and ends with endless leadership efforts to maintain employee morale high by addressing the varied values and needs of employees with diverse cultural backgrounds. Employee mobility and the trend of boundary-less organizations has been among the other macro economic factors that contributed to the increased challenges that today's corporate leadership is exposed with in the field of managing the cultural diversity in their facilities and offices located across the globe . One of the prime factors that have posed challenges for today's leaders is the varied personality attributed and characteristics of the diverse workforce.

Cultural diversity in the workplace is becoming more and more prevalent. Corporations in all industries are encouraging minorities, women, elderly workers, and people with disabilities as well as foreign workers to join in the workplace Workplace diversity aims at bringing various cultural differences and thought processes together for an all-encompassing thinking pool. In broad terms, it would mean the inclusion of people regardless of backgrounds, beliefs, social status, gender, impairments, physical appearance, etc. In order to lead the corporate in an effective manner while satisfying the needs and cultural demands of each employee, a leader has to be competitive and alarmed to see the long term impacts of any kind of change process initiated in the organization.

Objectives Of The Study

Considering the importance of Managing Cultural Diversity at workplace, the main objectives of the study are delineated below as:



- To reflect as to what is diversity management, why it is important for organizations to embrace the diversity at the workplace, and
- The role of leaders in successfully managing increased cultural diversity within the workforce.

Research Methodology

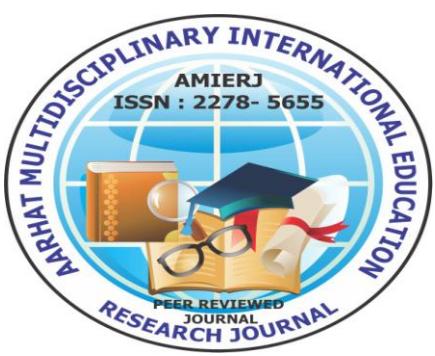
The research is a descriptive study based on secondary data collected from various books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and various websites of internet.

Issues In Managing Diversity

Organizations cannot have a homogeneous group to work with anymore. In at least 70% of all international companies, the work force will be a mixture of diverse cultures, religions and races. In such a scenario, it becomes important to promote ethnic, social, cultural and gender-related diversity in the workplace. In his assessment of the value of a multi-cultural workforce, (Konrad, 2003) states three reasons why companies are changing their attitudes and strategies regarding recruitment of employees with different backgrounds. Firstly, the best talent is not always local; you need to look globally to recruit the best minds in the business. Secondly, he talks about market share, that is, a culturally diverse workforce can better cater to an increasingly diverse customer base, hence increased market share. The insight that a local can provide into the workings of the local market and also of the mindset of the local consumer is invaluable. Finally, he states that each culturally different individual brings with him something different to the table, and when you combine all these different attributes, it results in making the organization more competitive.

Top Ten Reasons For Adopting Cultural Diversity

1. Fill job vacancies. Hiring from diverse groups can help you avoid a labor shortage by creating a larger pool of candidates from which to draw.



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- 2. Decrease or eliminate barriers to sales.** A diverse workforce has expert knowledge of the communities it represents and can help your organization expand beyond traditional markets and customers.
- 3. Develop and maintain a global competitive advantage.** Cross-culturally trained and multi-lingual staff will give your business a clear advantage to operate in today's global market.
- 4. Support your local community and economy.** Demonstrate your organization's commitment to the local economy by hiring men and women of different ethnicities of various ages and with varying abilities, from within your local community.
- 5. Save money.** Capitalize on the talents within your workforce and reduce employee turnover by learning to manage and maximize diversity in your workplace.
- 6. Enhanced productivity.** Homogeneous teams are less likely to produce creative, innovative solutions. With a diverse workforce that includes individuals of different ages, genders, sexual orientation, abilities, and cultural backgrounds, will overcome challenges through their wealth of experiences and perspectives.
- 7. Innovative problem solving.** Differences among team members contribute a variety of perspectives from different cultural backgrounds, ages, religions, genders and abilities.
- 8. Create a healthier work environment.** Effective diversity management can result in an accommodating and supportive work environment that recognizes the benefits of individual differences.
- 9. Avoid discrimination-based legal action.** Recognizing and embracing diversity in the workplace can limit the likelihood of lawsuits alleging discrimination. Lawsuits are expensive in attendant losses in productivity, settlement consequences and a tarnished reputation.



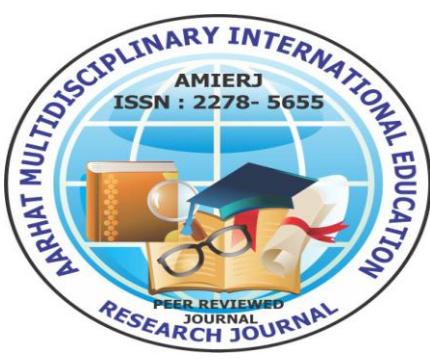
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10. Develop and maintain a positive public image. Offering services and/or products to diverse communities, your organization will stand out as a leader in your field which can translate into positive media attention.. The advantages of promoting inter-cultural communication in the workplace are.

- It provides for better approaches to the same problem. Imagine if everyone is brought up in the same manner, with the same set of values and thinking styles - they will tend to solve a problem in a similar way. Which directly translates to limitations. If there are different thinking styles then there are different ways of approaching the same problem and a probable better and more creative solution for it.
- Diversity at the workplace is essential because it allows for the best ideas to come forward and gives a wide choice of solutions.
- Diversity improves the effectiveness and productivity of the work force. A woman will approach a problem differently than a man would. Given a chance, a man or woman could prove their mettle by providing solutions that no one else has thought of, which is made possible because they are diverse in their thoughts and approach.
- It helps in promoting one's business and makes it possible to take it to an international level. Diversity in the workplace refers to the way a business is backed by varied diverse thoughts and cultures, thus the best of all worlds can lead to success.

It is because of all these reasons and more, diversity is becoming more and more important. With the world becoming more and more global, one will obviously wonder whether globalization is a boon or a bane. Well, it is to be understood that no matter what, it will become more and more diverse and nothing is going to stop the world from becoming a melting pot of cultures and different diversities. So instead of it being a negative thing, diversity helps to bring a positive reform in society.



Benefits Of Diversity

Diversity is often looked at as a force that creates inclusion, growth, achievement, camaraderie and equality for people from all backgrounds within the workplace. It changes workplace composition and therefore impacts organizational culture. There are many studies devoted to investigating both the positive and negative impacts of diversifying the workplace. The realization that diversity involves not only mixing races in one place, but integrating cultures, has created new understandings about the benefits of diversity in the workplace.

Diversity is designed to create positive opportunities for organizations. Managed properly, diversity creates greater innovation, or sharing of ideas, problem solving through different viewpoints, and better company performance through people bringing differences together for the good of the company. Customers, clients and investors are drawn to companies that have diversified on both primary and secondary levels. A diverse workforce can be a hard working and highly competitive workforce, one with the potential to reach clients and potential investors in ways that a non-diverse workforce cannot. It engages new cultures and increases social responsibility and it increases a company's worth through a gain in market share.

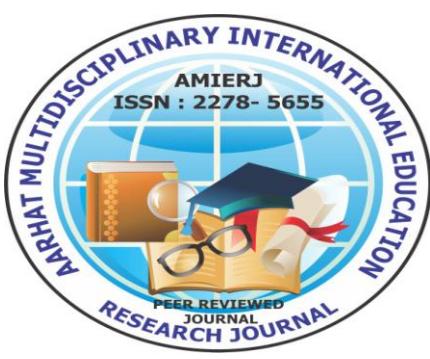
Thus diversity can benefit organizations in more than many ways:

➤ **Increased innovation**

A diverse workforce gives organizations a broader range of ideas and insights to draw on in decision making and policy development. Diversity makes good business sense.

➤ **Improved service to clients**

A workplace that reflects the population will understand its clients better, which will lead to improved service. A diverse workplace will have good communication with its clients based on a deep understanding of the needs across the province.



➤ **Competitive management practices**

Organizations that value and capitalize on employee diversity have productive and fulfilling workplaces which help them attract and retain employees. This leads to savings in recruitment and training costs, as well as maintaining corporate knowledge and expertise.

➤ **Modeling what we promote**

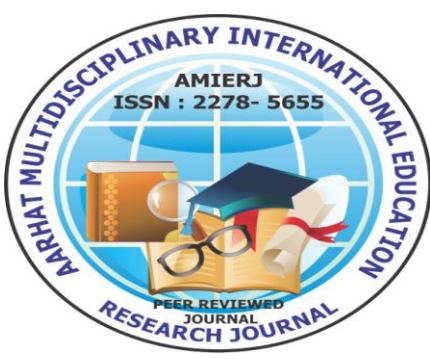
Some public service ministries and agencies have a role in promoting principles of equity and productive diversity in the employment practices of Saskatchewan businesses. It is therefore important that the public service itself demonstrates these principles.

Challenges Involved

One of the biggest challenges for any organization willing to adopt a culturally inclusive work environment is the assimilation of different members from the cultural pool. This makes it a very sensitive issue since different communities and their ideologies mostly end up serving the hegemonic hierarchy of organizations. Thus, proper management of the workforce, along with ideological counselling, becomes paramount. Communication runs a risk of being misinterpreted without a bar of equality setting certain standards. Therefore, a company needs to develop a strategy to prioritise the voices of their marginalized employees, so that none of them feel out of place in the workplace.

Role Of Leaders In Managing Diversity

The culture of an organization is reflective of the leadership. Sound leadership skills promote the negotiation of interactions across diverse cultural groups. Not only does it aid in better decision making and improved problem solving, but it also helps facilitate greater creativity and innovation, which makes better product development and successful marketing strategies for different types of customers.



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By understanding how this diversity can affect their organization, leaders are taking steps to assure a conflict-free environment and promoting positive outcomes for the business, as well as its employees. “Diversity today is being viewed as a key means to strengthen the human capital of an organization and improve overall performance”.

A leader of a company willing to promote and maintain diversity needs to follow certain guidelines when it comes to creating a harmonious work environment.

- ✓ Firstly, the company needs to include an anti-discrimination policy among their core values and principles. Setting up a safe environment will foster a harmonious working spirit. A strict disciplinary board against discrimination complaints, regular follow ups, and feedback can be some of the ideas to implement at this level.
- ✓ Secondly, the company should usher a celebratory sense of having a diverse work group, paying attention to the minorities and considering the overall diversity. A way to achieve this can be to use the office publication to bolster the existing diversity of staff. This way, the company will gain repute and appreciation.
- ✓ Thirdly, networking with various other diverse organizations will provide the employees an opportunity to showcase their experience outside of the workplace. Not only will this be a good insight into the modus operandi of the company, but will also infuse a sense of belonging among the employees.
- ✓ Fourthly, including an impartial expert to aid in the counselling of the employees, in terms of their work health, their cultural connect and their difference in understanding will foster a safe working experience for the employees.



Leader : Managing Cultural Issues

❖ Communication

Good communication is one of the best ways to manage diversity in the workplace. Encourage your employees to share concerns as they arise. Every employee should feel equally important to the company.

- Keep an open door policy.
- Be open with your employees so they feel comfortable coming to you with questions and concerns about issues, both non-work-related and work-related alike, such as diversity.
- Making yourself approachable will serve you well in handling conflict, and every employee will feel important.

Another way to improve communication in the workplace is to assign employees to project-based groups to work on large tasks, increasing teamwork and helping employees understand each other. Diversify the teams and encourage each team member to work peacefully with one another. They will find that amid their differences, each member brings a valuable addition to the team.

❖ Team-building

Some cultures - like the United States - are individualistic, and people want to go it alone. Other cultures value cooperation within or among other teams. Team-building issues can become more problematic as teams are comprised of people from a mix of these cultural types. Effective cross-cultural team-building is essential to benefiting from the potential advantages of cultural diversity in the workplace.



❖ **Time**

Cultures differ in how they view time. For example, they differ in the balance between work and family life, and the workplace mix between work and social behavior. Other differences include the perception of overtime, or even the exact meaning of a deadline. Different perceptions of time can cause a great misunderstanding and mishap in the workplace, especially with scheduling and deadlines. Perceptions of time underscore the importance of cultural diversity in the workplace, and how it can impact everyday work.

❖ **Calendars**

The business world generally runs on the western secular year, beginning with January 1 and ending with December 31. However, many cultures use other calendars to determine holidays such as New Years or specific holy days. For example, Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on a different day from western Christians. For Muslims, Friday is a day for prayer. Jews observe holidays ranging from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. These variations affect the workplace as people require time off to observe their holidays. A cultural calendar is a helpful tool to ensure meetings are successful, and deadlines are met.

❖ **Recruit Widely**

Diversity-minded recruitment strategies will raise exposure of the organization job and career opportunities within a diverse range of communities, and portray the organization as open and inclusive. Post job opportunities on different cultural and alternative lifestyle websites, and advertise them in minority language and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual targeted publications. Attend a diverse array of career fairs, including those that cater to visible minorities and alternative lifestyle communities



❖ Diversity Training

Diversity training can raise awareness, dispel myths and ensure that all employees have a proper understanding of the organization policies and conduct expectations, which should limit inappropriate humor and derogatory language. Proper training is also important to establish clear lines of communication and courses of action for employees who feel that their rights are being violated. Numerous consulting firms offer training courses on a wide range of diversity topics.

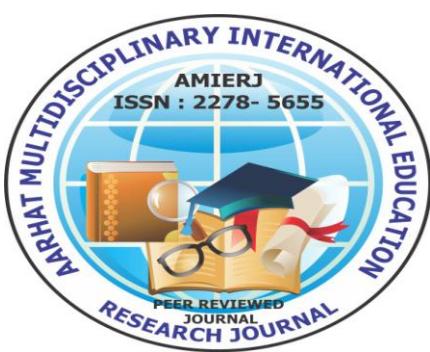
❖ Support groups

Employee support networks can help maintain a positive work environment for employees who face unique challenges at work. That will also improve employee retention. As Media Corp.'s 2010 "Best Diversity Employers Competition" highlighted, many large organizations, including Boeing, Ernst and Young, HSBC, Proctor and Gamble, the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia, invest significant resources in developing "safe" or "positive spaces" for ethnic minorities, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual employees, as well as employees with disabilities.

At the University of British Columbia, for example, employees volunteer to receive in-depth training on homosexual and transsexual community issues so that they may be identified as people who are available to listen to and advise individuals facing unique challenges in the office or classroom. Other organizations create support groups of employees that meet on a regular basis to openly and constructively discuss work challenges.

❖ Mentoring

Establish a mentoring program that pairs new employees from diverse backgrounds with senior managers to learn new skills, garner career advice and build professional relationships. These activities can make new employees feel welcome and supported, and motivate them to



perform at their highest ability. Career advancement opportunities can be a concern for representatives of visible minorities and alternative lifestyle communities, so it is important that they gain a clear vision of advancement, with well-defined goals and expectations, as well as positive role models who will inspire them to meet and overcome challenges.

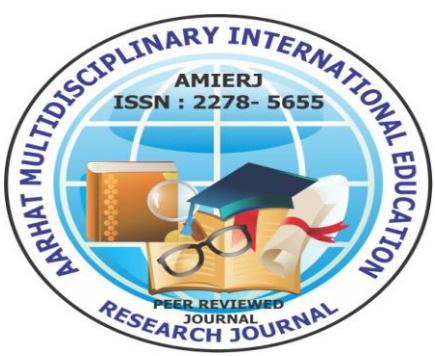
❖ Planning and Implementation

Business managers, in order to effectively manage diversity, must be able to plan and execute a diversity plan. This involves mapping out a way to create an appreciation for diversity in all employees in your office. Several methods exist to help you address this issue.

Plan a diversity retreat. Whether a weekend away or several day sessions in town, it's important for you, your staff and a diversity expert to discuss the issue in a non-business setting. A diversity retreat also allows employees to get to know each other and develop an appreciation for each other outside of work. Ideally, this person should work for the company and volunteer for the task. As part of their duties, he or she should attend diversity seminars once or twice a year and keep the staff knowledgeable and open to diversity. An incentive for the diversity officer might be more paid vacation days or, if the company can afford it, a raise.

❖ Conflict Resolution Skills

An essential tool to managing workplace diversity is the ability to handle conflict. Disagreements that arise because of cultural differences must be handled promptly and swiftly as to not decrease productivity in the workplace, be objective. When investigating a disagreement, be fair, objective and factual in the process. Ask each party question about what happened and take notes accordingly. Get to the bottom of the issue and, instead of placing all blame on one person, make sure each person knows the importance of accepting everyone and appreciating their role in the office.

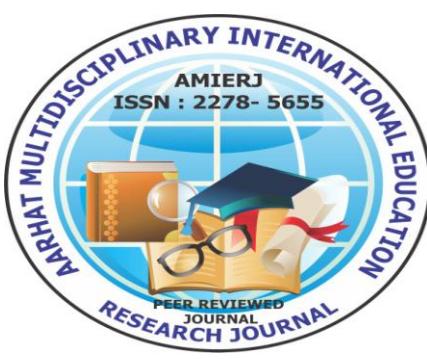


Conclusion

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. Although employees of different backgrounds do have similar organizational motivations, employers should know that a diverse workforce does come with some challenges. Having an inefficient organizational strategy for a diverse organization can reduce both morale and effective communication, and heighten conflict. Having good diversity practices will help decrease employee turnover, absenteeism, low productivity, and legal complaints.

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