The theories of diversity sociology essay

Diversity is defined as real or perceived differences among people that affect their interactions and relationship. In this paper will focuses on real or perceived difference among people in race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, physical, mental ability, sexual orientation, work and family status, weight and appearance. These area are differences that are based on power or dominance relations, between groups, particularly " identity groups" which are the collectivities people use to categorize themselves and other. They are often readily apparent, strong sources of personal identify and stem from historical disparities in treatment, opportunities, and outcomes.

Some diversity research has considered diversity in functional area, education, tenure, values and attitudes as they affect people's organizational experiences. While these areas may also be sources of personal identity and generally do not stem from historical disparities in treatment, opportunities, or outcomes. Focusing on any individual difference, rather than differences having strong personal meaning and stemming from or coinciding with significant power differences among groups, would make all groups diverse, and would therefore make the entire concept of workplace diversity meaningless.

People have different outcomes, opportunities, and experience in organizations, base on their group membership, In the United states, those who are white, male and do not have disability generally will earn higher wages and have higher organizational status than the person who are non white, female or have a disability (U. S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 2002). Whites are more likely to work in the primary labor market, which include jobs in large organizations, with more opportunities for

advancement and retirement, vacation, medical benefits. People of color are more likely to work in the secondary labor market of low skilled, low paid and insecure jobs. Secondary labor market jobs, often service-sector jobs, offer a little or no opportunities for advancement, health, vacation, or retirement benefits (Healey J. F, 2004)

The categorize of race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, physical appearance mental ability and sexual orientation are not mutually exclusive, however, men and women have a race and ethnic background, an age, sexual orientation, and religion. Further some of the categories are immutable, but others are not and may change over one's lifetime. People may be born with or acquire disabilities and everyone ages. A person who is dominant in one group may not be in another, for example white and female or male and Latin. A white man may have a disability, be an older worker, or a member of another non dominant group and personally experience job related discrimination. Hey may also have a working wife, mother, or sister who has face sex based salary inequity or harassment or a daughter or granddaughter whom he would prefer did not have to face such discrimination at work. In addition, diversity research consistently suggests that top management commitment is required to make a change. White men are considerably more likely to occupy leadership positions (executives, board members, or managers) than others. As such, they are more likely to have the power to implement important changes at the organizational level and influence behaviors and perspectives about the overall benefits of diversity; their commitment to diversity is essential.

Although the data clearly shows that some groups (people of color, women, religion, and people with disabilities) face more barriers and organizational discrimination, value of diversity to everyone is more stressed. As does Roosevelt Thomas, a pioneer in diversity work stated " Managing diversity is a comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees" (Roosevelt. 1991). At the same time, it's naïve to ignore the fact that membership in some groups or that some combinations of memberships have more negative ramifications for job related opportunities and success than others (Reskin & Charles, 1999). Commitment to diversity requires concerted measure to recognize, acknowledge and address historical discrimination and differential treatment, rather than undermining diversity programs or efforts to address inequities in the name of inclusiveness.

Theories

We have no doubt heard the term " diversity" many times, but what does it mean in the workplace. Usually when we speak about diversity, we only considering of gender, race, differences in the workforce. More broadly, the term of diversity refers to mixture of items, objects, or people that are characterized by differences and similarities. The similarities can be as important as differences (Roosevelt. 1991). After all, none of us are exactly alike. Thus, it is important to note that although two employees may have the same gender, ethnicity, or even education, they are different employees who may act differently and react differently to various management style. In the workplace, we refer to this variation with such terms as cultural diversity, workforce diversity, and cultural variety. Managers have to deal

simultaneously with similarities and differences among people in the organizations (Roosevelt. 1996). They must deal with diversity within their own organizations and in the organizations they encounter all over the world. The opportunities and difficulties inherent in managing multicultural organizations will be a key management challenge in the twenty-first century.

The increasing diversity of the workforce is due to four trends :

The tight job market, makes it very important to find the best workers and fully utilize them to do the best for organization

More companies are focusing their marketing efforts on the growing buying power in the minority markets. A diverse or segmented, marketing efforts require a marketing team that represents their market targeted.

More companies are seeking to expand their markets around the world. It take more diverse thinking to effectively achieve global market.

Company that sought to reach globally via expansion, acquisition, and mergers inevitably go through a period of consolidation to reduce duplication of efforts around the world and to capitalize on the synergies of cross border operations. Typically consolidation means that employees from around the world are thrust together in newly streamlined units. Resulting in more diverse groups

These four trends, then, are the drivers behind the increasing diversity in the workforce

Workforce diversity is the similarities and the differences in such characteristic as age, gender, ethnic heritage, physical abilities and disabilities, race and sexual orientation among the employees of organizations. In a diverse workforce managers are compelled to recognize and manage the similarities and differences that exist among people in the organization.

Employees' conception of work, expectation of rewards from the organization, and practices in relating to others are influenced by diversity. Managers of diverse work groups need to understand how the social environment affects employees' belief about work and the must have communication skill to develop confidence and self esteem in members of diverse work group. Many people tend to stereotype others in organizations. Stereotypes tend to become rigid judgment about others that ignore the specific person and the current situation. Acceptance of stereotypes can lead the dangerous process of prejudice toward others. 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, problem can arises. A second situation involving stereotyping occurs when manager stereotype workers according to some particular group such as age, gender, race, ethnic, religion and other characteristic. It is often easier for managers to group people based on easily identifiable characteristic and to treat these groups as different. Manager who stereotype workers based on assumptions about the characteristic 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 (Marylin Loden & Judy B.

Rosener, 1991)

Stereotype can lead to the even more dangerous process of prejudice toward others. Prejudice is judgment about others that reinforce beliefs about superiority and inferiority. They can lead to exaggerated assessment of the worth of one group and diminished assessment of the worth of others (Marylin Loden & Judy B. Rosener, 1991). When people prejudge others, they make assumptions about nature of other that may or may not be true, they manage accordingly. In other words, people build a job, descriptions, reward systems, performance appraisal systems, and policies that fit their stereotypes.

Management system built on stereotypes and prejudices do not meet the need of 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 lead these employees to lose self-esteem and possibly have lower levels of job satisfaction and performance. Stereotype 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 exist in organizations. Only then can they

begin to manage it appropriately. Managers who do not recognize diversity may have face unhappy, disillusioned, and underutilized workforce

The value of diversity

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 to organizational productivity. Today instead of a melting pot, the workplace is regarded as more of a tossed salad made up of a delightful mosaic of different flavors, colors and textures. Rather than trying to assimilate those who are different into a single organizational culture, the current view of organization need to celebrate the differences and utilize the variety of talents, perspective, and all 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 necessary evil, promoting a level of tolerance for those who are different, or taping 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 perspective that it makes available to the organization. Rather than relying on 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. The fresh perspective may lead to development of new products, opening new markets, or improving service to existing customers.

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

Dimension of Diversity

People do not have to be from different countries to have different values. Within a single country be it in the United States, United Kingdom, Indonesia or even in Malaysia, there are significant differences in values, beliefs, and morale. In the United States, race and gender were considered the primary dimension of diversity during the past two decades. However, diversity entails broader issue than these. In the largest sense, the diversity of the workforce refers to all of the ways that employees are similar and different. The importance of renewed interest in diversity is that it helps organizations reap the benefits of all the similarities and the differences among workers.

The primary dimension of diversity are those factors that are either inborn or exert extraordinary influence on early socialization. These include age, race and ethnicity, gender, physical and mental abilities and sexual orientation.

(Marylin Loden & Judy B. Rosener, 1991). These factors make up the essence of who we are as human being. They define us to others, and because of how other react to them, these factor also define us to ourselves. These characteristic are enduring aspect of our human personality and they sometimes present extremely complex problems to managers.

Age. The age issue is multifaceted and very individualistic. As people age they become more diverse in more ways. As the United States and the world's economy and labor productivity continue to grow, the demand for labor is expected to grow at 2 percent annually. At the same time fewer people are entering the workforce, and the workforce is growing older overall as the baby boomers move into the over fifty age range. The median age of the workforce increased from 35. 3 years in 1986 to 38. 2 in 1998 and 40. 6 in 2006. In addition the labor force participation rates for the workers over sixty five is expected to increase from 16 to 20 percent. This trend subsumes another workforce's participation for women over after fifty are increasing faster than for men over fifty; thus women constitute more of the increase in older workers. Older workers many need additional and different training in new technologies and equipment to accommodate their special needs. Managers will need to adjust physical facilities, equipment, and training methods to expect maximum productivity from the entire workforce. In the past, little allowance was made for a worker who could not conform to the standard equipment and expectations of the workplace. In the future work place will need to adjust to older workers.

Race and Ethnicity. Racial and ethnic cultural differences may be more important than most managers initially realize, because critical differences

exist across cultures in attitudes toward, beliefs about, and values surrounding work. The data show that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are increasing in number and in percentage of workforce. Although much has been accomplished in recent years, racial and ethnic minorities still believe that a significant barrier exists that keeps them from the top executive position. One of the primary reasons for turnover or attrition among women and minorities is the " glass ceiling" barrier that exist in company. The diversity director in one high tech company estimate that the cost of recruiting and training one new worker to replace one who voluntarily leaves exceeds $112. 000 Another cost is lower morale and productivity among those who do not leave. Companies today simply cannot afford to ignore the impact of racial and ethnic differences in the workforce. The glass ceiling is still in place for minorities and women, in spite of the years of progress and the new emphasis on valuing diversity.

Gender. Women were one of the first group to be emphasized in the early attempts at providing equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. Many organizations have always include at least some women, of course; the issue now is that women hold positions other than secretary, nurse, teacher and receptionist. Many companies have discovered that women hold many other types of jobs. Until recently, most manager assumed that women should be treated the same as men and they had the same reaction to issues.

Different abilities. An often misunderstood group, one that is more diverse than other, is people whose abilities are in some way limited compared with those of general population. Disability may be of many different types. Some

person has missing or non-functioning limbs, some have sensory impairments, others have problem related to disease such as multiple sclerosis and other have mental limitations of various kinds. Employers cannot discriminate in anyway regarding employment of persons with disabilities and employers must make reasonable accommodations in the work place to assist employees on the job. These workers are best referred to as " differently able" or " physically or mentally challenged" to indicate respect for the abilities that make them unique and able to make valuable contributions to the organization.

Sexual Orientation. Another dimension of diversity that may make some people uncomfortable but which is receiving increasing attention in organization is sexual orientation. As in the population in general, it is estimated that 10 percent of the workforce is homosexual. Homosexuals work in all types of industries. Although some homosexuals no longer try to hide their sexual orientation, many still feel that they must keep it a secret. Regardless of the comfort level, tolerance and openness among companies, managers of the future will have workers who may have a different sexual preference than themselves.

Secondary dimension of diversity include factors that matter to us as individuals and to some extent define us to other but which are less permanent than primary dimensions and can be adapted or changed. These include educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, parental stats, religious beliefs and work experience. These factors may influence our lives as much as the primary dimensions.

The impact of secondary dimension may differ at various times in our lives. For example moving to another part of the country or world may be traumatic for parent with several children, a person with no close ties or dependents, on other hand, may find it exciting. Family experience may also influence a manager's degree of sympathy with the disruptions of work life that sometimes occur because of personal responsibilities.

Employees enter the workforce with unique experience and background that affect their perspective of work rules, work expectation and personal concerns. Although employees may have essentially the same work hours, job description, tenure with the company, and compensation, their reaction to the work situation may differ significantly because of differences in these primary and secondary dimension of diversity.