Equal opportunities versus diversity management essay

To gain insight into equal opportunities and diversity management we will define them. We will then look at the differences between the two statements.

By gaining knowledge around the differences we will investigate what affect it has on organisations in their efforts of improving diversity. It will be looked at in the South African context. The next step will be to look at cornerstones reach by organisations this far.

As a conclusion we will look at the implications this has on management and the skills they will need to affectively manage diversity. Equal opportunities versus diversity management: To understand the statement of equal opportunities versus diversity management we first need to look at its definitions and what each statement means on its own. How does one interpret equality? The promotion of equality act (4/2000) defines equality as " the full and equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms as contemplated in the Constitution and includes de jure (by right) and de facto (in fact) equality and also equality in terms of outcomes". By reading Theo Wingrove's book on affirmative action it becomes clear that equal opportunities derived from the term affirmative action. Vincent Williams (as quoted by Wingrove, : 7) gives a good definition to substantiate this. " Affirmative action is about empowerment – about creating opportunities, mechanisms and structures to allow disempowered groups to develop their education, political, psychological and economic capacities in a sustainable manner. In the South African content affirmative action " addresses the disadvantages caused by poor education, prejudice, segregation, job reservation, racism, lack of political rights and unequal distribution of wealth" (Wingrove, : 7).

However there is a very clear distinction between the two as with affirmative action it favours a designated group while equal opportunities does not make a distinction but only focuses on equal opportunities for all. In other words equal opportunities highlights the fact that each person no matter who they are or where they come from need the opportunity and the necessary training to become the best they can be. With that being the objective of equal opportunities we have to note that equal opportunities can only be successful once all the disparities between all diverse employees are successfully brought to a level where there is complete equality. To achieve this objective the Employment equity act, (55/1998) was implemented with the sole purpose of this act being the achievement of equity in the workplace. This is done by eliminating unfair discrimination and by implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages of employment which was and is experienced by designated groups.

This is done to achieve equitable representation in all occupational categories. Better understanding of this is equal representation of minorities on all, both junior and senior levels of the corporation. Diversity management is the transformation or affirmative action and its main goal is " to change the workplace to be more representative of the population as a whole. (Grant, 2007: 2) So what does diversity management mean? Let's break it down. There are many different definitions of diversity but ultimately it comes to the same. The Definition of diversity is the representation of " the multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among people" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 37).

Diversity on its own means different. Thus, in the people context, each individual human being is unique and no one is the same. In some cases these differences seem more important than others. For example a person's age or skin colour, gender of race, where they stay or what they earn, their religion or believe and so we can list many differences. It can be concluded that diversity is who we are and what makes us different from the next person.

" Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe, a team of diversity experts, identified four layers of diversity to help distinguish the important ways in which people differ" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 37). Layer one is one's personality. This represents " a stable set of characteristics that is responsible for a person's identity". Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 37) The next layer will be that of internal dimension or primary dimension as per the workinfo. com human resources website. This layer represents those attributes which we have no control over such as Age, Ethnicity, Colour or Race, Gender, physical ability and our sexual orientation. This layer also determines most of our life situations as it mainly dictate with who we interact with, where we want to stay or what we earn. The third layer of diversity is referred to as the secondary dimension or external dimension of diversity.

It includes external factors which influence who we are. Examples of this will be income, geographic location (where you live or where you were born), parental status, marital status, political affiliation, believes and work experiences. Other factors will also be our appearances and our personal habits. This layer will be the one that influences your attitude and behaviour

towards life and other people. Diversity training in most organisations takes place at this layer. Why? B Vaugh (2007) (as quoted by Wikipedia, 2009), defines diversity training as " training for the purpose of increasing participants' cultural awareness, knowledge and skills, which is based on the assumption that the training will benefit an organisation by protecting against civil rights violations, increasing the inclusion of different identity groups, and promoting better teamwork.

" This layer to me is where diversity management can and must play the biggest role in the organisation. The reason for this statement is because this layer is mostly where perceptions are made. By effectively managing diversity it will eliminate those perceptions and diversity will be experienced more positively. The fourth or last layer is the Organisational dimension layer.

This would include management status, union affiliation, work location, seniority, work content and more. Management according to the Pharos School Dictionary means direct, rule or govern. " Management is the process of working with and through others to achieve organisational objectives in an efficient and ethical manner. " (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 15) In managing diversity it is exactly that. Managers must be able to direct employees from diverse backgrounds to enable them to work together effectively as a group. So what does diversity management mean in its entirety? " This concept is based on the premise that every individual has a uniqueness, bringing his own special talents and attributes to the workplace which can be utilised for the benefit of the greater whole. It seeks to explore individual values and

gain respect and value for differences. It rejects assimilation, seeks to expand the corporate culture to accommodate the diversity of its employees and encourages individuality.

This process is also seen as the ultimate ' maintenance management process' in a work environment that is made up of people with so many cultural, gender, ideological and other differences. It provides a foundation for the different human resources initiatives such as affirmative action, mentoring, succession planning and career pathing" (Wingrove, : 8) Diversity management can also be seen as " a planned systematic and comprehensive managerial process for developing an organisational environment that works for all employees". Thomas, 1990: 10) Effective diversity management will enable employees to perform at their best and to reach their maximum potential. Looking at the above we have established that there is a clear difference between equal opportunities and diversity management. If we look at diversity in the South African context it mainly refers to skin colour and equal opportunities refers to the disadvantages of the past which was caused by the lack of opportunities due to bad or no formal education as well as job reservation. However this being said we need to know exactly how diversity effects an organisation.

According to Lukas Ehlers (2005) diversity is related to 12 interpersonal skills. This is Cross-cultural understanding and respect, Intercultural understanding, Self-awareness, Objectivity, Managing of prejudices, relating to people from different backgrounds, flexibility or rather adaptability, openness, Honesty and transparency, ability to give feedback without

criticism, respect for fairness and equity, and facilitation skills. So by knowing this, how in our current setting does this influence the organisations' effort to improve diversity? In South Africa one needs to ask the question if equal opportunities and diversity management is because of the political demand or because of the organisations' survival strategy.

" It is a generally accepted fact that due to a long history of discrimination in South Africa, Blacks have not been able to realize their full potential and have been denied the capacity to compete" (Wingrove, : 13) The political reason has always been the main driving point behind diversity management as well as equal opportunities. Because of this pressure most companies employed blacks in an effort to colour in the picture and cut the process short. This brought on it own problems as proper skills were lacking. No career planning was done and employees from those minority groups realised the scarcity and demand for them and started job hopping which further increased the lack of skill and knowledge. This only increased the corporations' salary expense as they were prepared to pay for those employees with the thinking that they have the skills to do the job.

Companies must realise that managing diversity is not only about hiring quotas but it is about ensuring that these minorities is successful in the organisation. It must be said that organisations is beginning to see the positive side of diversity and that it is vital to their survival. That is what I believe through my experience is occurring at our organisation. Most corporate organisations are realising that the current reality facing all

organisations in South Africa is the facts of the ' critical shortage of skills' and the ' demographically representation'.

In other words the number of blacks versus whites in decision making positions in the organisation. With this being said, South Africa still faces a lot of challenges. The biggest is the assumption or believe by White males that diversity is about reverse discrimination. Not all have seen the reality of the fact that organisations all over the world are facing the crisis of mainly " four demographic-based characteristics of the workforce" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 44) These are "(1) woman are encountering a glass ceiling, (2) racial groups are encountering a glass ceiling and perceived discrimination, (3) there is a mismatch between workers' education attainment and occupational requirements, and (4) the workforce is aging" (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 44). Another reality which is facing organisations is the fact that equal opportunity can only happen in a perfect world. Why do I make this statement? Well " while ' all men are born equal in the sight of God', all men are not born with equal intellect, talent and abilities which will always result in inequality in spite of equal opportunity.

" (Wingrove, : 11) This statement has the biggest impact and affect on the organisations effort to improve diversity. As management in South Africa's corporations are still mainly white male it has created an assumption that to get along in the top levels of companies woman and minorities must act like white males. This is only now changing in some organisations as they see that in the long run embracing differences and having employees who are comfortable with their own believes and culture can bring those advantages

and benefits into the workplace. However this also lifts out another challenge as people are complex and have multiple identities. This being an advantage it can also create conflict in work teams or organisations.

Another barrier and true problem in the South Africa's footprint is the fact that with all of the above's main focus being on the minority and the wrongs from the past which mainly refers to black employees it has left behind people with disabilities. Diversity management and the creation of equal opportunities cannot be successful if it is not driven from the top. By visible support from the senior leadership team it creates an acceptance of staff at lower levels. Cornerstones for constructive diversity management " Regardless of gender, race, or age, all organisations need employees who possess the skills and abilities needed to successfully complete their jobs. " (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2008: 50) This must have been one of the biggest realisations by organisations and it must be said that it was an expensive lesson learned. They have realised that diversity management is a survival strategy, and without it they cannot exist. Organisations are no longer looking for the quick fix but at diversity in the long run.

Organisations are focussing on proper recruitment and the retention of staff and using those employees to the organisations' best advantage. They are looking at employee needs and realising that a happy employee can create a better and more successful organisation. What has been implemented by most organisations to achieve the above? They have created set values which can be embraced by all employees and which addresses equal opportunities. Communication is more open and ideas can be given directly

to top management. Most corporations have employed managers whose sole responsibility is diversity.

Succession planning and mentoring programs have been implemented to address talent and to speed up the learning process for the representatives of the minority. This in turn has created talent pools within those organisations which consist of very diverse people. In some cases corporations have implemented day care, flexible working hours, health care programs and access to psychologist free of charge. Programs have been introduced into the workplace to effectively integrate diversity. These are programs such as proper career planning and change leadership training. Other programs include personal mastery and talent management. Some of the programs from the past which still needs to be used would be things like awareness training. This is when you do self reflection or self analysing also called inside-out approach.

In a lot of cases by finding a solution through dealing with personal issues and feelings about diversity is so effective that there is now need to go further. Also a big cornerstone is the fact that training programs and HR managers were and is able to create the feeling of honour and respect. This has opened employees to accepting and valuing the diversity of one another as individuals. Kim Olver states that " Diversity is so much more than race and ethnicity. It has been defined as a total way of life and is learned" She used an example of a white child being raised by African-American parents. That child will have an African-American culture.

When employees and people truly honour, respect and value differences between one another, they are no longer so much concerned about who is right or wrong. The biggest thing about diversity was change and the ability to adopt. Steps of change usually start with resistance. Previous approaches to diversity ere more focussed on legislative requirements, affirmative action and regulatory issues of equal employment opportunities. Companies have now expanded the understanding of diversity and how they approach it. Diversity is understood as differences and about how to acknowledge these differences. They have started to capitalise on the knowledge that these differences can only bring positive business opportunities and give them a competitive edge in the market.

Equal opportunities " is not giving everyone equality, but giving everyone an equal chance to succeed" (Wingrove, : 34)Conclusion What are the implications to management? " A diverse organisation will out-think and out-perform a homogeneous organisation every single time. " A. Lafley, CEO – Procter & Gamble I think that the most important conclusion of the above is the fact that regardless of whom you employ in terms of diversity, management must realise that organisations can still only survive if they employ skilled people. By managing diversity effectively, it will create equal opportunities and staff will be placed in the organisation in roles which they know and can do effectively. This will in turn create much better benefits to the organisation. How? By having a diverse team and embracing this will increase innovation and increase the organisations ability to adapt to change and changing environments/markets. One of the pitfalls facing management is the danger of managing diversity and equal opportunities as Black

upliftment and not empowerment. By doing this it will only " reinforce the myth of White superiority and black inferiority".

(Wingrove, : 27) Looking at the statement equal opportunities versus diversity management, I disagree that it is a case of the one versus the other. I feel that diversity management and equal opportunities should be used hand in hand. The one cannot work without the other. As previously mentioned, equal opportunities can only happen once the diversity issues have been resolved.

It is also very important to realise that it is not about equality but about opportunities. Knowing this management of today must have the skills to contain and stimulate differences. These are also seen as key components in growth and change. Managers must have the ability to show respect toward diversity issues and promote positive responses towards those issues. I think one of the biggest challenges for management today is the ability not to be biased.

Managers, including myself like to believe that we are nice, fair and treat all staff equal. However, is this really the case? Do we not give a little more constructive feedback to this employee? Do we not coach and mentor the other one a little harder and more effectively. It comes back to Lukas Ehlers conclusion that diversity in related to interpersonal skills. Managers must be able to understand the different cultures and relate to different people from different backgrounds.

They need to be flexible, open and most importantly honest and transparent. A key skill must be that of straight talk, the ability to give feedback which is constructive and not criticising. They must have the ability to resolve issues around diversity in a responsible and ethical manner.

Another pitfall is the fact that we set project deadlines and important meetings without taking into account religious holidays except our own. Managers assume that the person who is well spoken is more intelligent and better doing the task than the person who struggles with his English. How can we as managers change this? It is our duty and fatal to our success to increase our own personal awareness. We must gain the knowledge about other cultures, their believes and where they come from.

We need to gain this knowledge and experience so that we are able to fine-tune our abilities on how to respond when our believes and values are challenged. Managers need skills on how to release potential in each individual in his/her team. Having a good diverse team stimulates debate which not only gets rid of assumptions about behaviour and work practices but enables the discovery of better ways of doing things and creativity within the team.

Managers must have the skill to facilitate to enable them to guide the debate and prevent it from becoming conflict. Diverse teams also help improve the bottom line of the organisation as they are able to understand customers better as they too represent a diverse group. For managers effective management of diversity is imperative for the organisations long term success. It is the only way that they can remain competitive as an

organisation in today's changing demographics. By managing diversity effectively organisations see and realise that the talent pool is decreasing constantly. Managers must be prepared to hold a mirror to themselves, embrace diversity not only because of data or statistics, but truly as a mind shift and behavioural change.

The need to change from ethnocentric views (" my way is the best") to a culturally relative perspective view (" taking the best of a variety of ways"). Elizabeth K. Arthur says it best. " Managing diversity for success is a strategy that goes far beyond valuing individual differences or developing human resources policies. It takes into account the globalization of the world economy, as well as changes to the domestic demographic characteristics of the population (diversity). Business leaders that recognize these changes as a business and social opportunity to increase productivity and growth will invest in time and money needed to develop, implement, monitor and review a diversity strategy that will have a positive effect in business, employees, suppliers, customers, products, and services. Businesses taking a strategic approach for Managing Diversity for success will be in the position to gain a competitive advantage.

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