Cultural diversity

Art & Culture, Cultural Diversity

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY

Defining DIVERSITY

Definitions of diversity range from distributive concerns based on the traditional categories of race, ethnicity and gender to the inclusion of a vast array of differences in age, sexual orientation, disability, employment status, tenure, function, educational background, lifestyle, religion, values and beliefs in addition to race, ethnicity and gender.

In the recent CIPD report, Diversity: Stacking up the evidence (Anderson and Metcalf 2003), three different types of workforce diversity were identified:

Social category diversity relates to differences in demographic characteristics, such as age and race.

Informational diversity refers to diversity of background such as knowledge, education, experience, tenure and functional background.

Value diversity includes differences inpersonalityand attitudes.

One of the most influential and well-received definitions of diversity management in the UK are given by Kandola and Fullerton:

' The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people consisting of visible and non-visible differences including factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style and is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productiveenvironmentin which everyone feels valued, where all talents are fully utilized and in which organizationalgoalsare met.'

The   positive   benefits   of   managing   diversity

1. Diversity enhances customer relations and increases market share.

2. Diversity enhances employee relations and reduces the cost of labour.

3. Diversity improves workforce quality and performance in terms of diverse skills, creativity, problem-solving and flexibility.

The negative outcomes of failing to manage workforce diversity

low   morale

ambiguity

conflict   and   tension

confusion andcommunicationproblems

These undermine organisational attachment and reduce effectiveness and workforce cohesion.

Diversity & Business Success

1. The effects of workforce diversity are conditioned by other organisational and contextual factors. 2. Diversity can't be used as a competitive organisational strength unless it's managed effectively.

Factors that influence the effects of diversity:

1.   the   nature   of   work   tasks
2.   corporate   business   strategy
3.   diversity   and   organizationalculture
4. diversity and context.

The   nature   of   work   tasks

Regarding the effects of the nature of work tasks on the diversity–business-

success relationship, Cordero suggest that, 'Homogeneity appears to be a benefit for groups with more routine tasks, while heterogeneity produces benefits for groups with more complex and interdependent tasks.' In other words, diversity among employees delivers a competitive advantage for organizations when the performance of novel and complex tasks that require high levels of creative thinking, innovation and problem-solving skills are involved. Corporate business strategy

' A growth-oriented, culturally diverse organisation benefits from employees who are flexible in their thinking and who are less likely to be concerned about departing from the norm.' Firms adopting growth strategies benefit from the increased levels of performance stemming from gender diversity at managerial level.

The positive relationship between business performance and workforce diversity in growth-oriented organizations holds true for race diversity as well as gender diversity; but race diversity is shown to be associated with harmful and negative outcomes for the downsizing firms.

Diversity and organizational culture
The third point that needs to be considered in analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of diversity regarding business success is organisational culture. It's argued that certain organisational cultures nurture the positive effects of diversity while others dampen them.

According to the research findings of Chatman et al (1998) organisational cultures based on collectivist values positively moderate the relationship

between workforce diversity and business performance by dissolving the conflicts stemming from and fostering the potential benefits of diversity.

Dwyer et al (2003 p1017), in their research of 535 banks on the relationship between management-level gender diversity, growth orientation and organisational culture, found that ' the impact of gender diversity on performance was dependent on the organisation context.'

Using the typology of cultures developed by Quinn and his colleagues, Dwyer et al argued that workforce diversity provides business benefits in a ' clan culture characterized by participation, teamwork, employee focus, consensual problem-solving and decision-making – and in an adhocracy culture – characterized by flexibility, spontaneity, individualism, entrepreneurship,

creativity, and adaptability (Dwyer et al 2003 pp1011–1012).

Another feature of the organisational culture that moderates the effects that diversity has on business performance is the extent to which equal opportunities and diversity are part of it.

Knouse and Dansby (2000) argue that organizations that embrace equal opportunities and diversity gain advantage through increased effectiveness, satisfaction

Diversity   and   context
To assess the impact of diversity on organisational performance, it' s crucial to overcome ' the widespread use of the " one-size-fits-all"' approach (Moor Barak 2000 p347).

Glastra et al (2000 p709) advocates a contextual approach to managing diversity:

' If diversity management is to have a positive impact, it must develop adequate solutions to organisational problems in the workplace. Issues such as structural arrangements, cultural patterns and the nature of the core business, external relationships and the strategic mission of an organisation all need to be taken into account. This calls for thorough and detailed organisational analysis. '

Working with Diverse Cultures
It is easy to identify the inherent obstacles and barriers associated with differences in religion, class, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, region of origination, educational level or even paid employees versus volunteer staff. The first phase of making the most of diversity is to:

make a concerted effort to become aware of what dimensions ofcultural diversityexist within an organization acknowledging there are differences between individuals and groups of people is an important initial phase. When conflicts, ill feelings or stressful situations arise due to the sub-cultures involved, it is because of " differences." The second phase of making the most of diversity is for people to talk about their cultural differences. Two things must be remembered concerning cultural diversity: People should remember it is difficult to address cultural differences without resorting to stereotypes. In the purest form, there is no such thing as a stereotype. No person is exactly like another person and no individual is a clone of another member of a group. As diversity in an organization grows, so does the complexity of communication and the necessity to spend greater effort

developing improved communication skills. Awareness and discussion can cause a clearer picture of cultural diversity. Appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity means not just tolerating differences among individuals or groups, but supporting and nurturing them. Diversity creates opportunities for character development by teaching tolerance andrespectfor people and by encouraging concern for equity. A culturally-diversecoalitionthat values and nurtures people from all backgrounds is worthy of active participation. Such an organization will flourish and perpetuate. Attention to cultural diversity may be the necessary catalyst for making things happen.

Gender   Diversity   in   the   Workplace
In the past, all women in the workplace were automatically assigned to temporary or part-time or lowresponsibilityjobs because it was understood that their first priority was taking care of their families. Unmarried women were likely to quit as soon as they married. Women with children were understood to care more about the children than about work. In addition, there was a widespread belief that women were not as capable as men, either physically or mentally or emotionally. Today, women are not generally seen as inferior to men. And there are women who want to put work first andfamilysecond. Most women in the workforce do not see it as temporary. Organizations have been slowly adjusting to these changes, learning to treat women as the equals of men and not as a pool of potential dates.

Both discriminating against female employees (in terms of hiring and advancement) and treating them in a sexual manner (sexual harassment) are now against the law. However, since there remain some women in the

workforce who do place family first, Felice Schwartz has suggested creating a " Mommy Track" which would allow them to have more flexible and shorter hours and lesser responsibility in exchange for lower pay and limitedcareergrowth. In other words, recognize the wider diversity of needs of employees today and set up systems to accommodate them all. Feminists worry that creating a Mommy Track effectively licenses corporations to discriminate against women. They feel that women (and presumably men!) should be allowed to have flexible work arrangements and remain on the fast track. Some people regard issues of treatment of various employee groups, such as those based on gender, race, and sexual orientation as primarily an issue of moral fairness. Women should be given the same career opportunities as men; homosexual couples should be given the samehealthinsurance benefits as heterosexual couples. American society and culture has changed considerably on these issues over the last 150 years (when women were not allowed to vote and slavery was still practiced), and organizations are asked to not only follow suit but lead the way.

However, many managers would counter that organizations are not supposed to change American society. They are supposed to manufacture goods and provide services formoney. Their responsibilities are to their stockholders, not women's groups. It might be morally desirable for corporations to give all their profits to the poor, but it would not be responsible action. Others see the issues primarily in strategic terms. Organizations compete for human resources and as the workforce becomes more heterogeneous, organizations will have to serve the diverse needs of

this workforce or they will lose them to their competitors. Organizations that discriminate against women are forced to select workers from a smaller pool, reducing their ability to find top performers. At the same time, some managers would point out that increased diversity can cause management problems. For example, having more women has meant more problems with sexual harassment (even if it's the men's fault). Increased diversity brings with it the need for more flexibility, which makes management more complicated (e. g., scheduling, compensation plans, interpersonal communication).

Diversity ; Ethics in the Workplace

Maintaining diversity and ethics practices is important to most small businesses who want to gain theloyaltyof employees and trust of consumers.

Ethics

Ethics starts with the basic assumptions all employees live according to basic moral guidelines and conduct themselves in the work environment accordingly. No matter the size of a company, unethical behavior can cripple the company's ability to attract customers, be approved for credit or maintain business partnerships. Different organizations and jobs may have different ethical issues arise and require a set standard of ethics. Even beyond professional practices, it is imperative that financial officers maintain fiduciary responsibility or that sales teams provide honest and reliable information in the sales process. Down the tier of employees, managers want to hire people who do what they say they will and perform their best at all times. Values and ethics are important in the workplace to help keep order, ensuring that a company runs smoothly and remains profitable. Each

individual company makes its values and ethics known almost immediately after hiring an employee, or many times, during theinterviewprocess. And in many businesses, no matter how well an employee performs, if he doesn't follow workplace values and ethics, it can result in termination. Dedication

How hard an employee works, or how much effort she puts forth, can go a long way. Obviously, companies want results, but most employers prefer a worker who gives an honest effort to one who might be considered a " natural" at the job, but is otherwise disruptive. Either way, when an employee signs on with a business, she is agreeing to perform her best to help the company flourish. Integrity

An important aspect of workplace values and ethics is integrity, or displaying honest behavior at all times. For instance, an employee who works at a cash register is expected to balance the drawer and deposit the correct amount of money at the end of the night. Integrity in the business world also might mean being honest when turning in an expense report or not attempting to steal a sales account from a co-worker. Accountability

Employees in all industries are expected to act accountable for their actions. That means showing up when they are scheduled and on time, and not taking advantage of time allotted for breaks. It also means accepting responsibility for when things go wrong, gathering yourself and willingly working toward a resolution. And sometimes it might mean working longer than planned to see a project through to completion. Collaboration

In almost every industry, workplace values and ethics consist of teamwork. That's because most companies believe that when morale is high and

everyone is working together, success will follow. So it is important for employees to be team players--whether assisting co-workers on a project, teaching new hires new tasks, or following the instructions of a supervisor. Conduct

Employee conduct is an integral aspect of workplace values and ethics. Employees must not only treat others with respect, but exhibit appropriate behavior in all facets of the job. That includes wearing proper attire, using language that's considered suitable around the office and conducting themselves withprofessionalism. Every company enforces its own specific rules on conduct, and typically makes them extremely clear in employee handbooks and training manuals.