

Managing diverse teams



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[Lecturer] Managing Cultural Diversity in The Workplace Cultural diversity has been heralded as a major opportunity by many authors and academics in harnessing the diverse talents and abilities within a workforce, however the management thereof often times is a source of consternation, frustration and when not conducted correctly can produce inadequate or even insufficient results. The complexities of successful cultural diversity management within the organization extend to the understanding of specific cultural differences within the workforce in question. According to Albrecht (2001) the realization and acceptance of the cultural diversity within the workplace, and specific to the American labor force, required that the management and leadership of both public and private enterprise should "embrace diversity", failing which may well "jeopardize their viability, profitability and competitiveness" within the business environment (p. 356.) To this end a "cultural awareness" program and/or policy frameworks were forthcoming. This is highlighted by the benefits that a holistic cultural and diversity management process and practice could realize, with respect to the mismanagement or lack of management skills and abilities, specifically around the benefits of a multicultural and diverse workforce can in fact be represented as a liability for the organization in question (Walker & Miller p. 50, 2010). The potential of such liability is highlighted below, as well as the benefits that may be directly associated with the sound and effective management of a culturally diverse workforce.

The Pros and Cons of Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Based upon the very fact of individual differences within various cultures, in terms of the different "values, styles and personalities", the modern day supervisor or manager must come to "recognize, respect and capitalize" on

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these traits regardless of the various backgrounds, normally based upon " race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation", and such diversity can in fact " also help improve the companys competitive position in the marketplace" (Walker & Miller). In addition to this Albrecht provides that the potential benefits associated to a multicultural workforce provide for " better decision making, greater creativity and innovation, and more successful marketing to different types of customers". However beyond the specific management and efficacy thereof, there are additional factors that are associated with the costs of multicultural workforces, which are highlighted as " higher turnover rates, interpersonal conflict and communication breakdowns." (p. 245, 2001.) These are the issues that require specific attention when seeking to manage a multicultural workforce effectively, and arguably the only way within which one may approach this area of management is via the sound and comprehensive training of both management and staff within communication and cultural differences, or so called " cultural sensitivity and awareness" that an organization may negate any potential communication breakdowns and interpersonal conflict, as previously mentioned.

The question arises as to how does an organization, or the management team effectively deal with these cultural differences amongst the various departments of the company. Although this may be viewed as a somewhat complex approach with respect to implementing sound management practice, a number of options exist in terms of the " acculturation" as provided by Albrecht in assimilation, pluralism and cultural separatism, with the first two concerned with the adoption of some or all of a specific cultural norms and the last one referring to little or no adaptation or adoption of the

cultural norms or practices of either of the dominant, minority or majority cultural group within an organization. The process whereby the acculturation occurs can be viewed as an integration process, and the various aspects of cultural differences, inclusive of items such as cultural bias and inter-group conflict need to be addressed from the very top right through the organizational structure. Arguably, and as previously stated, this is a complex process and requires specific and effective management to ensure the success of such cultural integration to encourage the apparent benefits of such a multi cultural workforce and dynamic.

In so far as examples of corporations that experience such cultural diversity, one has to merely consider the myriad of global organizations that have operations in various parts across the world. These would include the likes of MacDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Hewlett Packard and many others.

These companies have either adopted a more dominant culture approach, as in the case described above of assimilation, as well as the use of the pluralism within the integration process, in order to achieve a more common ground approach in understanding cultural groups within the organization.

The variety of cultural differences and practices, ranging from values, gender discrimination, subordination and supervision need to be taken into account within the organization and specific training formulated according to the needs of the particular company or organization must be analyzed and implemented to ensure a socially cohesive and cooperative environment within which communication barriers and interpersonal conflict is negated by the understanding, respect and management of the various social and cultural groups and dynamics within the organization. The benefits of such cohesiveness can be communicated to the cultural groups in garnering the

understanding and need for integrated acculturation within the company, with the promotion of a more pluralistic approach allowing for the formulation of what many may see as a "win-win" solution to any cultural issues that may exist within the company.

References

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