

EFFECTS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

Economic globalization is one of the driving forces of cultural diversity in the workplace. The modern workforce is made up of people of different genders, ages, ethnicity, religions, and nationalities. Employers have realized that workforce diversity provides both material and intangible benefits. In order for employers to reap the benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace, they must communicate their commitment to addressing the challenges of a diverse workforce. Employers must be seen to be celebrating their employees' diversity to avoid workplace issues, like awkwardness and hostility. Cultural diversity includes race, ethnicity, age, ability, language, nationality, socio-economic status, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. The group is diverse if a wide variety of groups are represented. Cultural diversity has become a hot-button issue when applied to the workplace. Cultural diversity in the workplace has grown as a trend over the passage of time with the increase of globalization in the world. One positive effect is that employees belonging to different cultures usually have different ways of thinking and can thus analyze a matter at hand from variety of perspectives. This is hard to achieve when employees belonging to the same culture are asked to analyze the same matter.

Keywords: Workforce diversity, cultural diversity, human resource management, etc.

1. Introduction

With the increase of globalization in the world, cultural diversity in the workplace has grown as attend. Cultural diversity is when differences in race, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation are represented within a community. Cultural diversity can affect the workplace in numerous ways. Negative effects can include miscommunication, creation of barriers, and dysfunctional adaptation behaviors. Positive effects can include building a sound knowledge base with in-house talent, which can make for smoother integration of the organization into foreign cultures.

2. Cultural diversity in workplace

In our fast transforming world, organizational leadership often lags the reality of their client-base. The gap between their clients and is often superficially bridged at the image level by advertising, sales teams and marketing. Advertising agencies manage at times to put on a face of a culturally-aware organization; sales teams are reasonably representative of their client base and marketing is occasionally targeted on the right market groups. But back at the office, many decisions are made in the old traditional ways. An individually-focused organization will motivate its teams on their individual performances. Everything will be "Key Performance Indicator" driven and individual success, at the expense of the less visible, will be encouraged. A community-focused organization will be focused on community and its all about us together as a community. They will often limit praise for individual successes and highlight group/community successes. In both individually-focused organizations and community-focused organizations there will be inter-level, inter-team and inter-personal challenges, resulting in workplace conflict. When the issues of uniqueness, culture, religion, race, beliefs, gender, age, ability, generations, qualifications and historical experience are added to the picture then workplace conflict is a given. These problems will be born of prejudice, jealousy, ignorance and the suppression of individual and workplace community aspirations and ideas.

3. Effects of cultural diversity

A positive effect of cultural diversity in the workplace is that employees belonging to different cultures usually have different ways of thinking and can thus analyze a matter at hand from a variety of perspectives. This is hard to achieve when employees belonging to the same culture are asked to analyze the same matter. Employees coming from different cultures have different experiences, which can be beneficial by providing the organization with a sound and vast knowledge base. Most of the workers agreed that group work with culturally diverse people helps to overcome cultural differences through shared experiences when working within a team. Negative effects include miscommunication, creation of barriers, and dysfunctional adaptation behaviors. Positive effects can include building a sound knowledge base with in-house talent, which can make for smoother integration of the organization into foreign cultures. One negative effect of cultural diversity in the workplace is the increased tendency of organizational personnel to indulge in interpersonal conflicts. Culturally diverse workers have different opinions, thoughts, beliefs, norms, customs, values, trends, and traditions. The analogy of an iceberg comes to mind in the face of these potentially endless dimensions; the obvious characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability relate to the small, visible portion of the iceberg and are the basis of much anti-discrimination legislation around the world.

4. Diversity and identity

When we talk about acknowledging the diversity of people, we refer to their identity and their culture. The identity is shaped by 3 dimensions namely, personal identity, social identity and organizational identity

Personal Identity: Your personality is partly shaped through your genetics and partly by the environment in which you grow up. It is not however as if you are a blank page on which these characteristics get imprinted. Personal identity is learned through introspection and experienced as one considers 'what I sense', 'how I feel' and 'what I think'. Your personal identity is what makes you unique, what makes you different in a special way. It can also be described as your authentic self. There will never be another person just like you. Developing a good awareness and knowledge of yourself is a crucial step in having an understanding of what you can contribute to a context.

Social identity: Someone once said that no man is an island. From the moment of your birth, your social identity has been shaped by the people around you. Just think of the name they gave you, the way they dressed you, the food you learned to enjoy, etc. That is why many people say that most of us has been socialized to be who we are in one way or another. The socialization process we all go through as children is a process we do not have much control over. As adults, however, we start making choices about the social groups we want to associate with and feel comfortable to be a part of. Therefore, your social identity is the part of your identity derived from knowing that you are a member of a social group and the emotional significance you attach to that membership.

Organizational identity: Who you are is also shaped by the organizations you are affiliated to. Think of all the organizations you belong to and how they shape who you are. The roles you play in the organization also have an impact on your identity. One of the most influential organizations in our lives is the workplace. Most of us spend the majority of our time, 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, with other people in this organization. The work organization determines our financial resources, our time off, how we should relate to our colleagues.

5. Suggestions for effective cultural diversity in workplace

Develop an understanding, and acceptance, of diversity - in so doing let the team experience harmony and teamwork in a transformational team-building environment. Develop a common understanding of who we are, why we are together and how relevant our work is to society, the organization, to family, to community and of course to the individual.

- Develop a common name and a team-based mission.
- Meet to clear past individual challenges, face-to-face.
- Develop a short list of positive and mutually understood and agreed values that must be adhered to by all members of the team.
- Develop a list of negative and destructive behaviors that must be eliminated from the team's interactions.
- Get agreement and sign a commitment.
- Commit to equality at the level of respect, include management and leadership.

- Put in place a peer-driven and managed monthly meeting structure to manage all aspects of the agreement and the behaviors of team members.
- Regularly rotate the chair and the scribe to prevent a power-base from forming.
- Ensure that the process is caring, motivational and empowering whilst developing understanding and maintaining discipline.
- The outcome through diversity training, team-building and clearing conflict is a powerful peer-driven workplace management system, led by the diverse team that it seeks to guide.
- Workplace diversity conflict is reduced through peer-agreement and management.
- Reduced management stress and wasted time, spent in work-place conflict resolution.
- Far less expenditure on labour dispute mechanisms and labour lawyers.
- Workplace teams that is involved, professional, committed and communicating.
- Better relationships with clients, family and community.

6. Conclusion

The impact of cultural diversity in the workplace can be both favorable and unfavorable. Some negative effects include dysfunctional conflicts, lost productivity, and difficulty to achieve harmony in group settings. Positive effects include a strong knowledge base created by a variety of cultural experiences, an in-house resource of cultural trainers and informers, and a greater tendency to expand the business in foreign cultures. The effects of cultural diversity in the workplace depend upon how well they are being managed by the organizational leaders. With proper strategic planning, top management can enhance the positive effects and reduce the negative effects of cultural diversity in the workplace.

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