Leveraging Diversity to Develop High-Performance Workplace: Analytical Essay

Abstract

Diversity is critical to an organization’s capacity to adapt to a fast-changing world. More diverse and inclusive workplace brings diversity in thoughts resulting in enhanced creativity and innovation. It is a new outlook to perspectives, experiences, culture, gender, and age which leads and manages a comprehensive workplace. This new outlook talks more about how others perceive individuals than how individuals identify themselves. As strength lies more in differences than in similarities, the time has come for all the organizations to respect, acknowledge, appreciate and engage these dynamic differences which result in better performance outcomes. Their focus must be on building capacity and enhancing the skills of individuals to experience the benefits of diversity and to leverage these benefits for a better workplace. The visible differences in race, gender, ethnic group, age, religion, sexual orientation, mental and physical conditions are just the tip of the iceberg called diversity, however, what manifests beneath is invisible behavioral differences that these evident factors bring among individuals. Every person from varied background has a unique and diversified thought process. Deeper study and understanding of these diversified behaviors will lead the organizations to perform effectively.

This paper will talk about major diversity issues in terms of individual’s behaviors and how to mitigate those differences and develop a high-performance workplace.

Introduction:

It is imperative that organizations are no longer able to choose to ignore a diverse workforce and are increasingly recognized as instrumental in improving an organization's performance.

Diversity at workplace promotes acceptance, respect, and collaboration despite differences in race, gender, age, religion, region, sexual orientation or communication patterns among employees. There are many tangible and intangible benefits that diversity at workplace brings in such as product and process innovation results from employees from a wide variety of demographics and backgrounds.

Undervalued, unacknowledged, and untapped human differences can pose significant challenges to amicable relationships and operational efficiency. When differences are valued, acknowledged and appreciated the harmonious associations and augmented thinking can lead to better results. The organizations then focus on building individuals and groups 'capacity and competencies so that they can experience the benefits of diversity and take advantage of these benefits.

Scope and Coverage:

This paper focuses on

- Study and understanding of heterogenous behaviors resulted from varied backgrounds
- Dynamic future behavioral gaps
- How to bridge the gap and develop a high-performance workplace

Definition of Diversity:

Diversity is the condition for requiring or even being composed of distinct fundamental elements, in particular the inclusion of different types of people in a cluster or organization.

Understanding Diversity at the workplace:

Diversity as an idea includes acceptance and respect and states that everyone is unique. It’s the study of the variances in a safe and cultivating environment.

Diversity is way over simply just accepting/tolerating the distinction. It is a collection of cognizant practices that involve:

- Appreciating mutuality in humanity
- Practicing mutual respect
- Understanding that, diversity includes not merely the ways of being however additionally the ways of thinking.
- Bridging the gap across variances and eradicating all sorts of discrimination.

Diversity thus is realizing the best approach to leverage those characteristics and conditions those are completely different from our own and outside the clusters to which we belong yet accepting that they are present in other individuals and groups.

Dimensions of diversity:

Diversity includes everybody because people vary from one another in multiple ways. The most important dimensions of diversity may be classified as primary and secondary dimensions. Primary dimensions embrace age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities/qualities, sexual orientation etc. Secondary dimensions include work background, marriage status, income, parental status, geographic location, religious beliefs etc. The primary dimensions are permanent and are extremely significant in their effect. The secondary dimensions play a substantial role in shaping humanity when leveraged in a systematic manner.

The visible differences in race, gender, ethnos, age, religion, sexual orientation, mental and physical conditions are simply tip of the iceberg know as diversity, however, what manifests beneath is invisible behavioral differences.

Figure 1: Visible and Invisible Diversity Traits

Age, culture, gender, nationality, ethnicity/race, mental/physical ability

The diversity of thoughts, values & beliefs, perspectives, working style preferences

Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014

When we see someone, we notice, make assessments and build choices concerning the way to interact with that individual based on primary dimensions. These reactions influence relationships. It’s natural to have an affinity between two individuals with a similar dimension of diversity. However, with rise in the more diverse communities, it is utmost vital to deeply perceive the term diversity and its dimensions.

Advantages of diversity at workplace:

Diversity can provide potential benefits to organizations. The countless advantages include helping organizations reach diverse customer groups and markets to promote innovation, superior work and performance.

- Fosters Innovation
- Workforce diversity enhances innovation because heterogeneous groups bring in more bouncing diverse ideas and offer feedback and suggestion.
- Employees from different backgrounds offer a variety of solutions for achieving common objective.
- The more the diverse ideas the more are the chances for workable solution improvement.
- Upsurges productivity
- Workplace diversity increases productivity and competitive advantages
- Because of new ideas and processes brought into the organization by diversified workforce, organizations can offer more solutions to clients
- Workplace equality encourages employees from all backgrounds to feel confident about their ability and achieve their best. It increases the morale of employees and makes employees want to work more efficiently and effectively
- Language Diversity – Makes the penetration easy
- Many times cultural and language barriers are hindrances to expand the business overseas.
- By appointing workforces who speak varied languages, a company can enter global markets and interact with a wider customer base
- Higher employee engagement and lower employee turnover
- Employee engagement is an outcome of diversity and inclusion.
- When an organization acknowledges and accommodates the diversities within its various workforce, a sense of togetherness can be created.
- It’s a straight forward relationship between diversity and employee engagement – when employees feel included, they are more engaged.
- When they feel accepted and valued, they are happier in the workplace and stay longer with the company.
- Better company reputation
- Companies dedicated to building and promoting workplace inclusiveness are known for their open-minded and collaborative attitude
- Job seekers are attracted to companies with a diverse workforce because it is obvious that companies do not discriminate against employment.
- Budding customers often feel much appreciated and thus provide these organizations with a lot of business.

The reality gaps

On the one hand, diversity offers organizations several advantages, on the other, it has its own implications. Although throughout the time it had improved and understood greatly, still there are grey areas in terms of its effect on workplace productivity. Diversity has an adverse effect on workforce efficiency if not handled appropriately. When different minds come together, the result can be monumental. However, as the workforce becomes more diverse, more challenges arise accordingly.

Dynamic diversity challenges on the below areas can hit the workplace productivity

- Communication
- Technology
- Change
- Collaboration

Communication:

Communication is an important part of the workplace. It underlies the productivity and quality of workplace relationships. Diverse employee population delivers diversified communication styles. Understanding communication issues between varied groups can help to bridge this gap. If we take generational diversity as an example, there are lots of differences in communication styles between the old and younger employees. Issues arise between multi-generations as one communicates in a quick and instant way where the other feels it is very informal. With virtual teams, agile talent and remote offices in current digital workplace, corporates must focus on possible communication strategy planning and tools. Diversity can enrich the workplace productivity if the organizations are open to these possibilities of reaching and learning new ways of communicating.

Technology:

There is a transformative impact of technology on the modern workplace. Face-to-face meetings, mailrooms, and typewriters have often given way to video conferences, emails, and word processor. A substantial portion of work and the workforces have moved beyond the confined traditional offices and started working from cafes, home, even working from vacations. Diversified workforce if not oriented and trained well on the technology, it may be a hit on workplace productivity. Boomers and Gen X need to see the technology the same way the millennials see. Role of organizations in making the workplace technology friendly is no less than the role of employees. Companies must update their infrastructure and technology to make reasonable accommodation for employees with physical disabilities.

Change:

Change is an inevitable part of any business. Evolution of workplace has happened from daily commute, traditional centralized offices and face-face work with teams to non-traditional workplaces, telework from home. To keep pace in a constantly evolving business world, organizations often need to implement changes affecting their processes, people, and products. Change can be difficult, and people often resist it. Bringing in change into the organization with a diversified workforce is much more difficult. Employees from varied backgrounds, opinions, values, and thoughts may not take the change as positive as it is. Initiatives like improving

employees understanding of change, boosting trust, implementing change related training initiatives can assist the employees to adapt to change without affecting their productivity.

Collaboration:

Collaboration between teams and employees is directly proportional to workplace productivity. This is the major gap which can arise if proper care is not taken and can adversely affect efficiency. Diversity is a multiplier of the intellect, but only when different groups can work together. Embracing diversity and overcoming prejudices and unconscious biases make a multicultural workplace tolerant workplace. Common gender stereotyping, discrimination, judging on the sexual orientation will make the workplace unhealthy in turn demotivates even the highly intellectual and skilled employees. Implementing initiatives to accept alternative lifestyles, avoiding assumptions, creating a trustable work environment, inclusive leadership and training & development can boost the morale of the diversified workforce.

Conclusion:

As global markets emerge, and workforce demographics shift, workforce diversity has become a business necessity. Employers reap tangible and intangible benefits from diversified groups. It is not just enough to understand the importance of diversity, but companies need to put effort to leverage the benefits to improve the organization's efficiency. This is possible only through identifying probable gaps and filling them with feasible solutions. Organizations should define and design a ready to fit model which focuses on every parameter starting from recruitment till separation. Definitely, there is no one size fits all model, hence organization specific models will haul and reap the benefits.

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