

# ***Work Force Diversity : Issues, Effects, Benefits and Challenges at Workplace***

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## **Abstract**

*Workplace diversity is a people issue, focused on the differences and similarities that people bring to an organization. It is usually defined broadly to include dimensions beyond those specified legally in equal opportunity and affirmative action non-discrimination statutes. Diversity is often interpreted to include dimensions which influence the identities and perspectives that people bring, such as profession, education, parental status and geographic location. Workforce diversity continues to be a key focus for organizations, driven by globalization of the economies and the desire for organizations to more accurately reflect the demographic diversity of the population. Factors such as the rising numbers of immigrants, mergers or joint ventures with companies in other countries, the rising use of temporary and contract workers, and the increasing globalization of business are a few of the forces making the workforce more diverse daily. Workforce diversity has continued to grow in importance to organizations. This paper tries to identify the effects of workforce diversity on the workplace and thereby discusses the issues associated with it.*

**Keywords:** *Stereotypes, Experiential, Management paradigms, Empathy, Ubiquitous*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

“Diversity includes all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals.” A common misconception about diversity is that only certain persons or groups are included under its umbrella, when in fact, exactly the opposite is true. Diversity includes the entire spectrum of primary dimensions of an individual, including Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Age, Religion, Disability. Secondary dimensions commonly include: communication style, work style, organizational role/level, economic status, and geographic origin (e.g., East, Midwest, South). It is a simple fact that each of us possesses unique qualities along each of these dimensions. Experience and recent research indicate that when recognized and valued, diversity

enhances individual productivity, organizational effectiveness, and sustained competitiveness. In order “to maximize the utilization of its human capital, organizations must go beyond merely creating a more diverse workplace. Once there, the value of having diverse employees must be recognized.” Now is the time to move beyond viewing diversity as merely the numerical representation of certain groups. It is time for a systematic application of diversity concepts to the business of the organization. Diversity is viewed as something more than a moral imperative or a business necessity i.e. as a business opportunity. Aligning diversity with the mission and business of the organization increases employee satisfaction and retention; improves

competitiveness and productivity; increases responsiveness; and adds value to the customer.

The term "Workforce Diversity" refers to policies and practices that seek to include people within a workforce who are considered to be, in some way, different from those in the prevailing constituency. Diversity is the inclusion of things, people, and places that are different. For example, having different races, genders, ages, and ethnicities of people in one place is showing great diversity. No one thing or person is the same and is made up of different cultures and backgrounds. Also diversity can be the different opinions of individuals.

Over the last few years, it is getting clearer that organizations commence to pursue workforce diversity as a competitive necessity. It is not only to avoid the heavy costs of litigation, but to value and pursue workforce diversity well so that organizations could attract, retain and encourage the contribution from a diverse population of employees to serve diverse range of customers, work effectively with business partners and suppliers, and satisfy shareholders. This is in light with growing multiculturalism of workforce and market places. The new concept of diversity calls for recognition of contributions of the individuals with diverse background. It calls for management of organizations to embrace difference and inclusiveness, not just tolerating those who are different but celebrating those differences. It calls for opening of work opportunities to the men and women of different colors, races and religions. It calls for diversity beyond gender, values, or social norms that each individual lives.

## **2. CHALLENGES OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY**

**(a) Communication :** Perceptual, cultural and language barriers need to be overcome for diversity programs to succeed. Ineffective communication of key objectives results in confusion, lack of teamwork, and low morale.

**(b) Resistance to change :** There are always employees who will refuse to accept the fact that the social and cultural makeup of their workplace is changing. The "we've always done it this way" mentality silences new ideas and inhibits progress.

**(c) Implementation of diversity in the workplace policies :** This can be the overriding challenge to all diversity advocates. Armed with the results of employee assessments and research data, they must build and implement a customized strategy to maximize the effects of diversity in the workplace for their particular organization.

## **3. MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO DIVERSE THEIR WORKFORCE**

The seven predominant factors that motivate companies, large and small, to diversify their workforces:

**(a) As a Social Responsibility :** Because many of the beneficiaries of good diversity practices are from groups of people that are "disadvantaged" in our communities, there is certainly good reason to consider workforce diversity as an exercise in good corporate responsibility. By diversifying our workforces, organisations can give individuals the "break" they need to earn a living and achieve their dreams.

**(b) As an Economic Payback :** Many groups of people who have been excluded from workplaces are consequently reliant on tax-supported social service programs. Diversifying the workforce, particularly through initiatives like welfare-to-work, can effectively turn tax users into tax payers.

**(c) As a Resource Imperative :** The changing demographics in the workforce, that were heralded a decade ago, are now upon us. Today's labor pool is dramatically different than in the past. No longer dominated by a specific homogenous group, available talent is now overwhelmingly represented by people from a vast array of backgrounds and life experiences. Competitive companies cannot allow discriminatory preferences and practices to impede them from attracting the best available talent within that pool.

**(d) As a Legal Requirement :** Many companies are under legislative mandates to be non-discriminatory in their employment practices. Non-compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity or Affirmative Action legislation can result in fines and/or loss of contracts with government agencies. In the context of such legislation, it makes good business sense to utilize a diverse workforce.

**(e) As a Marketing Strategy :** Buying power, particularly in today's global economy, is represented by people from all walks of life (ethnicities, races, ages, abilities, genders, sexual orientations, etc.) To ensure that their products and services are designed to appeal to this diverse customer base, "smart" companies, are hiring people, from those walks of life - for their specialized insights and knowledge. Similarly, companies who interact directly with the public are finding increasingly important to have the makeup of their workforces reflect the makeup of their customer base.

**(f) As a Business Communications Strategy :** All companies are seeing a growing diversity in the workforces around them - their vendors, partners and customers. Companies that choose to retain homogenous workforces will likely find themselves increasingly ineffective in their external interactions and communications.

**(g) As a Capacity-building Strategy :** Change is the norm in the business climate of the 21st century. Companies that prosper have the capacity to effectively solve problems, rapidly adapt to new situations, readily identify new opportunities and quickly capitalize on them. This capacity can be measured by the range of talent, experience, knowledge, insight, and imagination available in their workforces. In recruiting employees, successful companies recognize conformity to the status quo as a distinct disadvantage. In addition to their job-specific abilities, employees are increasingly valued for the unique qualities and perspectives that they can also bring to the table.

#### **4. ISSUES OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY**

A diverse company can find new markets more readily; can more easily recruit desirable workers of different races and ethnicities; and can remain flexible in a competitive environment, according to the University of Florida. However, diversity also creates potential issues in the workplace, which a prudent employer needs to understand if he hopes to support a diverse workplace.

**(a) Miscommunication :** A diverse workplace often means that employees communicate in slightly different ways. That can result in confusion or even inadvertent insults between employees who are not accustomed to each other's cultural customs. Miscommunication affects workplace productivity and can create a hostile or poisonous environment if left unaddressed. Managers can avoid miscommunication issues by understanding such customs as much as they can and by promoting an atmosphere of clarity and openness when perceived miscommunication can be cleared up.

**(b) Stereotypes :** As much as people may wish otherwise, stereotypes and preconceived notions about those who are different continue to crop up in

society. This can spill over into a diverse workplace in the form of assumptions and even outright prejudice, and may accordingly create new tensions in the workplace. In some cases, stereotyping may actually entail a positive quality — such as assuming that an Asian employee is good at math — but can cause prejudicial harm nonetheless.

**(c) Resistance to Change :** In companies that do not reflect a diverse workplace, the first steps toward diversification may meet with some resistance. This differs from stereotyping in that a newly hired employee is not being judged on particular assumed qualities, but simply because he is different from the majority of the workforce. Such resistance can lead to slowed productivity, clashes between the new employee and his co-workers, and even legal action brought by the new employee for perceived hostility in the workplace.

**(d) Costs :** In some cases, promoting a diverse environment may entail additional operating costs, which an employer needs to be aware of before increasing the diversity in the workplace. This often applies to employees who have different physical needs, such as a ramp built for someone in a wheelchair or materials printed in Braille for an employee who's blind. Not all employee needs can be anticipated in advance, and a company may need to make ongoing adjustments to accommodate their diverse workplace.

## 5. KEY REASONS BEHIND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

These are four key business reasons to hire a diverse workforce:

**(a) All business is now international :** There's no such thing as a local company anymore. "The Internet has influenced all commerce," but organizations can't afford a localized or provincial attitude about what we carry and serve. Every

business, whether small-town retailer or international marketer must be savvy about the future generations and how we will trade goods and services across national borders and in multiple languages.

**(b) Conflict is a good thing :** Small-business owners may hesitate to hire qualified candidates different than themselves or the rest of the staff because of worries about resulting tension. But think about it. New ideas only emerge from friction and need. Innovation only arises out of conflict. Comfort zones are hardly the birthplaces of creativity. Plus, a company's values and culture begin at the top. It's hard for outsiders to come into such a cozy environment. You either fit in with them or you don't fit in at all. But that makes the resulting business extremely inflexible."

**(c) Small pools run dry :** With competition fierce and markets international, the organizations should not narrow their search for skilled help to shallow areas of the talent pool. They should focus on precise skills, competencies and experience to do the job you need done.

**(d) Diversity drives sales :** Nearly 80% of Fortune 500 companies now have some kind of diversity efforts in place. Increasingly, government and corporate vendors will contract only with suppliers that can demonstrate cultural readiness.

## 6. FORMS OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

**(a) Demographic :** The most basic type of workplace diversity is that of demographic background, which encompasses age, gender and ethnicity. Demographic diversity can also include professional degrees, work history and veteran and disability status.

**(b) Experiential :** Varied life experiences represent another type of workplace diversity. For example, a

military veteran or a retired athlete will have unique ideas and perspectives due to their respective experiences, as will a homemaker, a single parent and a political refugee.

**(c) Informational** : Informational diversity refers to differences in educational background and individual knowledge base. For example, an individual with an MBA will have a different base of knowledge and understanding than a high school dropout who became a self-made millionaire.

**(d) Fundamental** : Workplace diversity also encompasses more fundamental differences of values and objectives. Individuals often have very different fundamental beliefs and goals about the importance, purpose and function of work, as well as the relationship between the individual employee and the larger organization.

**(e) Considerations** : Some types of workplace diversity can contribute to conflict in negative ways, such as the interpersonal conflict that may arise between individuals of diverse demographic backgrounds. Other differences, though, can foster creative debate and innovative action, such as individual differences in experience and information base.

## **7. PROS OF HAVING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

**(a) Increased staff retention** : Diversity strategies encourage respect between employers and employees. This often results in increased loyalty and engagement. As well as improving productivity, it can provide a better return on skills investment and maximise organisational knowledge.

**(b) Improved recruitment** : Diversity practices can help ensure workplaces effectively tap into the diverse talent pool, hiring and engaging people with the skills and commitment they need to prosper in difficult economic conditions.

**(c) Greater business productivity** : Diversity practices acknowledge people as a critical strategic asset. A multi-skilled and versatile workplace is engaged, open to change and innovative.

**(d) Reduced absenteeism** : Versatile workplaces which offer flexible working options, create a positive workplace culture and support and reward employees on the basis of merit, experience lower absenteeism.

**(e) Better customer service** : Diversity practices often improve staff satisfaction and morale, as well as sales and performance.

**(f) Attracting new customers** : Effective diversity management can be powerful tools to help business effectively recruit and manage people who can attract new customers. Diversity in the workforce reflects an increasingly diverse customer base.

**(g) Better health and safety** : Workplace discrimination, stress and inadequate training can all result in health and safety issues. Work-life initiatives aim to create a healthy work environment which supports people at work and outside work.

**(h) Enhanced company image** : Workplaces that are committed to practices that encourage diversity are seen as good corporate citizens or "Employers of Choice". Doing the right thing with the right people for the right reasons often translates to higher productivity and improved return on investment, as well as better customer relations.

## **8. CONS OF HAVING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

Business communities admire employers that strive to increase diversity throughout the workforce. However, companies that implement their strategies for increasing diversity encounter a number of challenges. The challenges related to receptiveness to training and prioritizing hiring

decisions based on diversity can transform those challenges into disadvantages.

**(a) Mandatory Training :** Increasing workplace diversity often includes mandatory diversity training, during which employees, supervisors and managers receive lessons on how best to interact with customers, clients and employees who represent diverse populations. Mandatory training for some employees is the equivalent of forcing employees to accept diversity at all costs, regardless of their personal exposure and experiences. Training that's forced upon employees may have unintended consequences. Employees who feel diversity training shouldn't be mandated might believe instead that the mere concept of diversity is more important than any other kind of employee training and development the employer provides to improve employees' skills and capabilities.

**(b) Hiring Manager Authority :** In the name of increasing workplace diversity, employers may feel pressured to recruit applicants from diverse groups. Many hiring managers believe that employer edicts concerning increasing diversity require them to overlook more suitably qualified applicants in favor of applicants who bring diversity — not necessarily talent — to the organization. In these circumstances, hiring managers may begin to resent how increasing workplace diversity affects their ability to exercise independent judgment, as well as their authority in making hiring decisions.

**(c) Workplace Relationships :** Employees who realize the company's goal is to increase diversity may feel they are less important if they don't represent the typical diverse populations that focus on race, sex, national origin, age and disability. In a workplace where employees don't belong to diverse populations, these employees may feel undervalued and unappreciated based purely on the fact that they don't represent diversity. They also

might believe that employees from diverse groups have more opportunities for advancement, thus disrupting the working relationships they once had with colleagues and co-workers.

**(d) Myriad Accommodations :** Although the premise of workplace diversity is mutual respect, making accommodations for numerous diverse groups' demands can become burdensome on employers, making diversity management difficult. Employee requests and work constraints based on religion, national origin, gender and race can become overwhelming if your workplace has so much diversity that it takes a full-time human resources staff member just to keep track of accommodating the needs of diverse groups in the workplace. Examples of accommodating numerous diverse populations include translating materials into multiple languages and having interpreters on hand for meetings with employees, accommodating employee absences due to religious practices or disabilities, as well as adjusting business hours to coincide with preferred schedules for employees with different work styles and personal obligations.

## **9. ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

**(a) A diverse workforce drives economic growth.** Our nation's human capital substantially grows as more women, racial and ethnic minorities individuals enter the workforce.

**(b) A diverse workforce can capture a greater share of the consumer market.** By bringing together individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, businesses can more effectively market to consumers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, women.

**(c) Recruiting from a diverse pool of candidates means a more qualified workforce.** When companies recruit from a diverse set of potential employees, they are more likely to hire the best and

the brightest in the labor market. In an increasingly competitive economy where talent is crucial to improving the bottom line, pooling from the largest and most diverse set of candidates is increasingly necessary to succeed in the market.

***(d) A diverse and inclusive workforce helps businesses avoid employee turnover costs.***

Businesses that fail to foster inclusive workplaces see higher turnover rates than businesses that value a diverse workforce because they foster a hostile work environment that forces employees to leave. The failure to retain qualified employees results in avoidable turnover-related costs at the expense of a company's profits. Having a diverse and discrimination-free work environment helps businesses avoid these costs.

***(e) Diversity fosters a more creative and innovative workforce.*** Bringing together workers with different qualifications, backgrounds, and experiences are all key to effective problem-solving on the job. Similarly, diversity breeds creativity and innovation.

***(f) Businesses need to adapt to our changing nation to be competitive in the economic market.*** Our economy will grow and benefit from the changing demographics if businesses commit to meeting the needs of diverse communities as workers and consumers.

***(g) Diversity is a key aspect of entrepreneurialism.*** Our nation's entrepreneurs are a diverse set of people of color, cast, creed individuals.

***(h) Diversity in the workplace is necessary to create a competitive economy in a globalized world.*** As communities continue to grow, it's important to harness the talent of all individuals be it nationally or globally. Our increasing diversity is a

great opportunity for us to become more competitive in the global economy by capitalizing on the unique talents and contributions that diverse communities bring to the table.

## **10. IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

***(a) Talent Pool :*** Access to a larger talent pool is one of the biggest advantages of having an employment recruitment policy that values diversity. Employees from all races, classes, creeds, religions, ages and political viewpoints should be recruited based on competencies and skill sets, without regard to gender or disability.

***(b) Varied Viewpoints :*** Teams working on complex and expansive projects can draw on the varied experiences of fellow workers from diverse backgrounds. This can aid in understanding new markets — foreign or domestic.

***(c) Organizational Productivity :*** When human resources channels and harnesses varied skills, specialized competencies and distinctive capabilities of employees of multiple races and minority classes, it can result in creative solutions for problems and better organizational productivity.

***(d) Reduced Discrimination :*** Regular interaction with people from different countries or backgrounds can help reduce discrimination, prejudice and misunderstandings from earlier eras. Taking time to celebrate of fellow workers cultures and holidays can boost morale and create a better team bond among diverse employees.

***(e) Global Citizens :*** Cultural multiplicity, ethnic diversity and multiple viewpoints bring vibrancy to the workplace. Fostering workplace camaraderie and a humanitarianism spirit shape employees to be better citizens of tomorrow.

## **11. MANAGEMENT OF DIVERSE WORKFORCE AT WORKPLACE**

**(a) Diversity Management Paradigms :** There are following four paradigms, describing the efforts of management intervention in workforce diversity.

**(b) Resistance Paradigm :** Organizations react to resist change due to diversity by maintaining the status quo in the absence of any pressures to increase diversity and by reproducing inequality without an equal opportunities or diversity policy.

**(c) Discrimination-and-fairness Paradigm :** Organizations focus on equal opportunities and fair treatment through legislative actions and by treating everybody the same. This is demonstrated by concentrating on staff recruitment as a means to increase the numbers of employees belonging to disadvantaged groups.

**(d) Access-and-legitimacy Paradigm :** Organizations focus on a search for business benefits, maximizing every individual's potential as a source of competitiveness by creating a culture and environment of respect.

**(e) Learning-and-effectiveness Paradigm :** Organizations emphasize the linkages of diversity with work and employee perspectives, moving from identity-groups towards learning opportunities in order to gain the benefits of diversity. In this paradigm, egalitarian organizational culture is seen as a means to higher standards of performance and in which employees are viewed as valuable resources, strategic assets and as an investment.

**(f) Initiatives for managing Diverse Workforce :** Diversity focuses on the similarities and differences employees possess within an organization. Although equal opportunity laws establish anti-discrimination standards in the workplace, these laws fall short of providing protection for personality differences that stem from upbringing,

socialization and cultural characteristics. Employers can fill this void by establishing ways to introduce diversity in the workplace.

**(g) Implement a Diversity Policy :** Businesses can implement a well-defined policy to introduce diversity in the workplace. The purpose of the policy should be to focus on the acceptance of the individual differences and lifestyle choices of all workers. A strategic inclusion policy promotes diversity by focusing on areas such as recruitment, performance management, work/life balance and company restructuring. Companies can focus on practices that support diversity such as non-discrimination initiatives, affirmative action and diversity recruiting goals, domestic partner benefits, open-door policies and harassment-free workplace initiatives.

**(h) Start a Focus Group :** A focus group is a small group of employees who come together to share beliefs, opinions and ideas about a particular subject. A creative way to introduce diversity in the workplace is to conduct a diversity-themed focus group. Focus groups provide a safe environment for workers. Employees are more inclined to express their opinions about sensitive issues. During the focus group, employers can pose questions that uncover employee attitudes about diversity and what can be done to promote diversity.

**(i) Conduct Training :** A creative method of introducing diversity into the workplace is to execute a cultural education and training program. Cultural education and training programs improve employee communication and allow workers to view their jobs from a different perspective. Education and training initiatives focus on best practices for working in a multi-cultural environment as well as how to interact.

**(j) Hire a Diversity Consultant :** Diversity consultants assess organizational goals and suggest ways

to introduce diversity programs to an organization. The goal of the consultant is to customize a diversity program that integrates every level of an organization. Consultants help implement diversity training programs, mentor programs, diversity task forces and committees that support organizational diversity efforts. Diversity consultants also develop and implement standards to measure and track the progress of diversity initiatives.

## 12. APPROACHES FOR MANAGING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

### (A) Individual Approaches :

Diversity can be managed by the individuals in two ways :

**(a) Learning :** Many managers are often unprepared to deal with diversity; because of their inexperience they do not know how to respond. To better prepare themselves, managers must work hard to learn and experience as much as they can about developing appropriate behavior. They can learn more by communicating one-on-one with the young and old employees, women, minorities, and those with disablement in order to determine how best to understand and interact with them. In this way managers can learn more about a diverse group's characteristics and how the workers want to be treated. Managers should also develop personal style that works well with each worker of a diverse group. Managers can also ask their workers to tell him truthfully that how they want him to treat them and so he can adjust his behavior towards each worker.

**(b) Empathy :** Empathy means to put yourself in other person's place and see things from his point of view. Empathy is closely related with learning. It is important in the study of diversity because members of diverse group think and feel that only

they can truly understand the challenges and problems they are facing.

### (B) Organizational approaches

Organizational approaches to managing diversity include a variety of techniques. Some of the common techniques are testing, training, mentoring and programs designed to help personnel effectively balance their work and family life.

**(a) Testing :** Most of the tests have been culturally biased. It means that they are made for only a particular culture and are not valid to all cultures. So, those who do not belong to that culture perform poor on these tests. Therefore, in a really multicultural organization, the tests should be designed so that they have suitability for all people regardless of their cultures. For example, when an NGO needs word processing personnel it can give a timed test for accuracy and speed measurement rather than a general test. And select the best applicant without the considerations of age, gender, social class.

**(b) Training :** Training can play important role in two ways. One is providing training to the diverse groups. The second is providing training and education to the managers. A technique most widely used by some researchers on management involves putting the trainees into ethnic groups. Then each group is asked to describe other groups. The purpose of this exercise is to gain insight and knowledge about the way one group perceives other group. Then at the end both workers and managers are trained how to better communicate and understand other groups.

**(c) Mentoring :** A mentor is a trusted counselor, coach, or advisor who provides assistance and advices. In recent years, many organizations have begun assigning mentors to women and minorities. The purpose of mentor program is to help members of a diverse group in their jobs, socialize them in the cultural values of the organization to improve their working and solve their problems. Mentors are useful

as they provide instructions in specific skills and knowledge needed to perform the job.

**(d) Work/family programs** : Nowadays, in most countries most of the both parents have to work and this gives them less time to look after their children and spent time on family matters. So, to solve these problems a number of methods and techniques are given.

- ↖ **Flextime**, it allows workers greater choice in choosing their timings for the work.
- ↖ **Compressed work weeks**, in this arrangement all the work of the week is compressed in to fewer working days. Hence giving more time for the families to get together.
- ↖ **Job Sharing**, it is splitting a full-time job position between two people.
- ↖ **Telecommunicating**, it is gaining popularity. In this arrangement the workers can do their office work at home.

### 13. **SOLUTIONS FOR EFFECTIVELY MANAGING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE**

**(a) Incorporate Diversity Initiatives into All Aspects of the Organization.** Integrate diversity into all processes, core values and strategic plans. Managers and all top executives must take responsibility for diversity, not just the human resources department.

Broaden Definition of Diversity. Beyond visible differences such as race and gender, also consider geographic background, sexual orientation, language, religion, ability or disability, communication style and work function.

**(b) Raise Awareness of the Value of Diversity Among Your Staff and Promote It.** Actively promote and celebrate the fact that you have a diverse workforce. This will illustrate to your

employees that diversity is embraced and will give them a sense of comfort with their surroundings, leading to greater productivity.

Raising awareness will also ensure that your employees are on board and agree that a diverse workplace is important – even necessary for a business to thrive.

**(c) Treat Everyone as Individuals.** No two people are alike. Examine employees and recognize their strengths, weaknesses, preferences and work style. This will allow you to assign tasks that play to their best abilities and give them a greater chance for success. This also allows to limit opportunities for failure.

**(d) Look for Opportunities to Learn.** Be observant of your employees and try to learn more about their heritages, traditions and beliefs. This knowledge will allow you to compare the differences and similarities of your staff and build on those for the benefit of your organization.

**(e) Set Aside Time for Team Interaction During Regular Meetings.** Encourage all employees to take part in the discussion and give their thoughts on how they feel things are going. This will allow you and your staff to learn more about each other.

**(f) Regularly Assess Your Work Environment.** On a regular basis, survey your staff regarding the current work environment and ask questions about how comfortable they are working for you and with other employees. This will identify any issues that exist and give you the opportunity to address them.

**(g) Address Concerns Immediately.** If a concern regarding diversity in your work environment is brought to your attention, address it as soon as possible. Carefully examine the situation to ensure you know all of the facts. If a change is necessary, take action and address the issue. This will show your staff that you take it seriously and consider it an important factor for the success of your company.

**(h) Encourage Diversity Management Training.** If you feel your organization needs to learn more about managing a diverse workforce, seek out training for you and any other managers in your business.

#### **14. STRATEGIC PLAN MANAGING DIVERSITY AT THE WORKPLACE**

Diversity means accepting, understanding and valuing differences among individuals. Having a diverse workplace gives business ideas and innovations from a variety of backgrounds and cultures.. Developing a diversity strategic plan for the workplace helps an organization to operate in a global marketplace.

**(a) Set Goals :** Setting diversity goals for your organization is the first step toward developing a strategic plan. The primary goal is your diversity mission statement, which should clearly communicate your commitment to diversity.

**(b) Develop the Plan :** Objectives in the strategic plan should relate to your employees, your customers and your community. An employee-related objective could be to recruit and hire workers from a diverse talent pool. A customer-related objective could be assess your customers' demographic information and train your staff to develop communication skills specific to your customers' needs. A community-related objective could be to contribute volunteer hours and funds to a local nonprofit organization that serves a diverse segment of the population.

**(c) Implement the Plan :** Launch your diversity strategic plan with an all-employee diversity meeting where you go over the plan with your team and answer their questions. Ask all your employees to commit to work on one area of the plan — employees, customers or community — to help achieve the objectives. Each employee should have a clear vision for his participation in the plan.

**(d) Measure Results :** Periodically measure your progress against your goals. Ask employees to report on their activities under the diversity strategic plan. Revise your goals if you need to, either to move to the next step if you achieved the goal or to simplify the goal if it was too grand or ambitious to realistically achieve.

#### **15. DIVERSITY TRAINING**

Diversity training is a fundamental component of a diversity initiative. The purpose of training is not only to increase awareness of workplace diversity, but also to develop and enhance skills among employees to help them communicate more profoundly in the future. Differences in race, sexual orientation, education and work experience can cause tremendous damage. Although diversity training cannot all together change individuals' beliefs, it has the ability to increase awareness, impart knowledge and educate employees further on how to accept differences among fellow employees. The main goal of a successful diversity training program is to create a positive work environment by helping employees recognize and be tolerant of differences among co-workers.

#### **16. APPROACHES OF DIVERSITY TRAINING**

**(a) Universal :** The Universal approach to culture places emphasis on human similarities while group differences are de-emphasized. The essential assumption is that we are first and foremost individual human beings and only secondarily does our experience and identity derive from other group memberships (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender, etc.). Much of traditional psychological theory and practice is characterized by the Universal approach. As is our dominant cultural belief, What matters most are *individual* differences. The Universal perspective closely resembles the color-blind vision

of all people living in harmony, wherein group differences are of little or no relevance.

**(b) Ubiquitous :** The Ubiquitous approach is one that holds all difference associated with group membership as salient. All forms of social or group identity or shared circumstances are considered cultural. Culture can be a function of, geography, income, gender, age, religion, sexual preference, and so forth. It equates social group affiliations or domains of differences within a super-ordinate culture as representing distinct cultures. In this way, if a person develops a particular socially based identity based on class or age, then this, according to the Ubiquitous perspective, is culture. The view of difference as common experience or identity presumes that one's commonness cuts across super-ordinate cultural patterns. Diversity training that uses this approach insists that differences be acknowledged and celebrated and that everyone's social identity be 'accepted.' By defining the various social group affiliations or what I call 'domains of difference' as "cultural," the domains of difference are legitimated. This results in a focus on multiple group differences, which is supported by the concept of culture. The advantage of this perspective is that reference or social group differences of any sort will not be seen as dysfunctional. At the same time, the Ubiquitous approach can lead to avoidance and denial of groups' socio-political histories, intergroup power dynamics, and the relative salience of various reference group memberships.

**(c) Traditional :** The Traditional approach defines culture as country, which means a common language, values, beliefs, rituals, symbols, and so forth. One is a member of a cultural group by birth. Central to this definition of culture is common experience as a function of socialization and environment. Ideally, variability within cultures is acknowledged; at least in regard to non-White populations, less variation within groups is recognized. Regarding diversity training, it is suggested that some "experience" of another

culture is essential, the purpose of which is to give the person exposure to the new culture; the idea is that one person or family is representative of the entire group. Proponents of the Traditional cultural approach assume that exposure to the culture or cultural knowledge is the primary key to effective cross-cultural learning. The advantage of this type of approach is that it reminds us that society's institutions reinforce the meanings of behavior, thought, and feelings learned through family. However, the disadvantage of this approach is that it de-emphasizes similar processes that occur within a particular country or that evolve as a consequence of racism. The traditional perspective does not specifically address intergroup power dynamics.

**(d) Race-based :** People are classified into races by skin color, language, and physical features. Race-based theorists hold that the definitive aspects of culture, for example, cultural values, vary ultimately according to psychologically (i.e., racial identity) and socially based racial categories. The Race-based view assumes that the experience of belonging to a racial group transcends/supersedes all other experiences. The Race-based approach assumes that intergroup power dynamics are important. The Race-based approach makes explicit how untenable is the idea that it is possible to become sensitive to another's culture without first dealing with the overlay of race. The advantage of this perspective is that it considers the importance of socio-political and historical dynamics on current events. It also introduces psychological variability to racial groups such that membership alone does not determine cultural affiliation. The disadvantage of this approach is that it requires a deeply personal and potentially painful journey and soul-searching for each person to become comfortable with his or her racial socialization. It is difficult to address race as a social and personal issue since it tends to be treated as invisible in the social structure particularly in organizations.

**(e) Pan-national :** This perspective views race in the global context as definitive of culture. The Pan-national perspective has been proposed by non-Europeans, According to this approach colonialism, slavery, and their legacies, were used to oppress non-European people and also alienated them from their cultures. In addition, Whites developed a culture and social structures that are based on violence and exploitation.

A Pan-national organizational training approach would focus on the rejecting European forms of oppression. It would attempt to enable trainees to understand and emancipate themselves from Eurocentric organizational approaches as a requisite first step. Thus, scholars who teach and train from the Pan-national perspective advocate knowledge of ancient history and racially- and culturally-based characteristics and experiences. The Pan-national assumptions has the advantage of allowing for a broad and global understanding of race as it relates to oppression throughout the world and demonstrates how groups are connected by color and common experience. Its disadvantage is that when viewing racial oppression as the primary construct for cultural difference one may overlook the role of other important reference groups such as religion and social class variation.

## **17. DIVERSITY TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN THE WORKPLACE**

**(a) Spider Web :** Despite coming from different backgrounds, many people have shared similar experiences growing up. One training activity that seeks to point this out is a game that Top 7 Business calls "Spider Web." During the game, all employees form a circle and one person is handed a ball of twine. That person shares an embarrassing story about himself from his past and then tosses the twine to someone at the opposite side of the circle while still holding onto the end. Once everyone has taken a turn, the group will see how they are all connected by the twine and by their shared experiences.

**(b) Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes :** Made famous by diversity trainer Jane Elliot, the Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes training activity requires a workforce to be divided into two groups based on eye color. For a few hours, supervisors must favor one group while verbally demeaning and denying privileges to the other group. This activity attempts to show everyone that discrimination is often based simply on arbitrary factors and also seeks to infuse a sense of empathy throughout the workplace.

**(c) Diversity Bingo :** One way to highlight how diverse a workplace is comes in the form of a training activity that is referred as "Diversity Bingo." A bingo-type scorecard should be given to each employee and each square should consist of statements such as "a person who speaks more than one language" or "a person who is Muslim." Each employee must circulate through the workplace seeking to obtain the signature of a person to whom a statement applies. After a predetermined length of time, the group should discuss topics such as which squares were the easiest to fill and what initial perceptions they had about each other were proven wrong during the game.

## **18. INSTRUCTIONS FOR DEVELOPING A DIVERSITY TRAINING PROGRAM**

- Survey employees in your organization. Don't start from scratch. A diversity training program should reflect its recipients. Develop a sense of what issues employees currently face so the training can address these issues.
- Develop a training section around gender. Whether said or unsaid, employees have a natural tendency to play out gender roles in the workplace. Training participants should be able to discuss what it's like to be a man or woman working for your organization. You should address any specific workplace policies related to gender, such as gender discrimination or sexual harassment.

○ Build a section around ethnicity. This will make up a large part of the training, given the wide ethnic variety that may exist within your organization. Employees also may interact with clients or external constituents of different ethnic backgrounds. Even if your organization is primarily homogeneous from an ethnic standpoint, participants should discuss their own ethnicity as well as others'. Also discuss topics like language—words or phrases specific to a certain ethnicity or offensive to a certain ethnicity—and perceptions or stereotypes. Address any policies related to ethnicity such as racial discrimination or racial slurs.

○ Include a section on religious and political views. Participants can discuss how they believe their employer handles these areas, as well as whether or not they feel comfortable enough to discuss these issues in the work environment. Communicate that it's not important for everyone to agree with certain religious or political views, but that each employee should respect them and their colleagues' right to them.

○ Gather as much feedback from participants as possible once the training's complete. It is usually the most helpful to take a two-step approach. Distribute an evaluation form for participants to complete at the end of training. Then consider sending an additional request via email to capture any residual thoughts. Use this

feedback to foster further development of your diversity training program.

## **19. CONCLUSION**

With the growing diversity in the workforce due to globalization, mergers, acquisitions, immigration, and other factors, the diversity in benefits must keep pace. Employees will shop for benefits as never before; and companies, needing to hire the best, must keep abreast of what bench-marked companies are doing in the way of benefits to match the workforce diversity. Effects of diversity and effects of diversity management have to be considered separately. Diversity holds the potential for increasing performance, but not every kind of diversity will always lead to synergy effects on group level. Diversity effects are strongly context dependent. Diversity management, however, can be beneficial even where diversity does not lead to synergies. This is because diversity management may change diversity effects and diversity management may produce benefits other than – and also independently of – synergetic diversity effects on a team level. Given adequate context conditions and diversity management measures, benefits such as the effective use of talents through suitable recruitment programmes, increased access to diverse markets, or increased job satisfaction through a flexible adaptation to the needs of a diverse staff, can reasonably be expected.

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