Diversity Management- A Concept beyond Equal Opportunities and Discrimination.

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Abstract

In this Era of Globalization, where every organisation is working towards having an international competitive advantage, the importance of managing diversity which implies the need to be proactive in managing the needs of a diverse workforce under equal opportunities based on gender, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief etc and also beyond equal opportunities and discrimination should be realised. In this study, discrimination at work will be discussed along with the legislative framework including proposed changes in the HR policies in this area. This article will also focus on the equal opportunities practices and initiatives in the workplace along with the move from equal opportunity to managing diversity which is a concept that recognises individual differences beyond equal opportunity and discrimination. Finally the study concludes by stating how these practices will contribute in creating a fair and safe workplace environment.

Keywords: Diversity Management

Introduction

“The workforce in advanced industrialised economy is diverse and the management challenge is to match that diversity within the organization. This is both for legal compliance and to gain possible business advantage from this environmental change- there is indeed a business case for diversity” (Boddy, 2008, pp. 369). Equal opportunities can be defined as a management approach which guarantees equal and fair treatment to people at work, irrespective of age, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief. According to Cole, 2004, the following are the principle acts dealing with unfair discrimination, they are Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, and Fair Employment Act 1989. Gender and ethnic origin are the two most important dimensions of diversity. However it has to be understood that some aspects of equal opportunities can be achieved by legislation while others depend upon practising fair models of work practice which have no legislative foundation.

Equal Opportunities - Avoiding Types Of Discrimination

There are four main types of discrimination which occur in the workplace, they are direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment. (Daft and Marcic, 2008). Direct discrimination is when one group of employees are treated less favourably than the other group on the basis of gender, race, etc. A typical example of direct discrimination would be failing to promote women because she is pregnant or failing to promote people belonging to a particular race beyond a certain level in the organisation’s hierarchy. Indirect discrimination is defined according to the Employment Equality Act (2006) is defined as putting one group under a particular disadvantage by adopting a practice, method or provision. An example for indirect discrimination would change the shifts to early mornings to put the women in childcare at a disadvantage (Daft and Marcic, 2008). Victimisation is when an employer isolates and disadvantages workers who have voiced their opinions against the management in a public forum or have exercised their legal rights or have helped others to do so against an important person in the top management or the company as a whole (Daft and Marcic, 2008). A typical example would be to reduce the promotion prospects of an employee who has recently threatened the organisation to take a complaint against it to the Employment Tribunal owing to discriminatory practices. Harassment is said to have happened when an employee subjects a person to conduct him/herself in such a way that violates his/her dignity and self respect by creating an intimidating and hostile environment for him/her. Harassment is usually targeted at gender, race or religious belief etc. Harassment is a form of direct discrimination and most important type of harassment which is much talked about is sexual harassment.

Women In The Workplace

Although the number of women in the workforce has increased, they do not have equal access to all occupations (Boddy, 2008). Statistics show that women have contributed directly in home based industries such as textiles and also in the agricultural industry since the medieval times, the acceptance of women in paid employment has been a slow process. A significant percentage of women in the UK workforce today are heavily concentrated in categories such as hotel and catering, textiles, footwear, professional and scientific services.
Sexual Harassment which is one important form of direct discrimination as already discussed is subjected to legal action if a person on the grounds of sex engages in intimidating and obtrusive verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct that violates the women’s dignity and creates an offensive environment for her or on the rejection of his advances or unwillingness to co-operate treats her less favourably. (CIPD, 2007). There are certain codes of conduct which should be slowed by organisations in order to avoid Sexual Harassment which includes issuing a clear statement which clearly reveals examples of what type of actions come under harassment, bullying and intimidating behaviour, also explaining the dangerous and the damaging consequences and effects it would lead to, why such actions would not be tolerated and they would be classified as Gross misconduct and would be subject to disciplinary procedures and all such complaints and allegations will be solved and treated rapidly, seriously and confidentially. . (CIPD, 2007).

**Policies To Ensure A Fair And An Equal Working Environment.**

A number of measures are required to put the equal opportunities which are about avoiding discrimination in practice. According to Ingham (2003), the following steps should be undertaken by an organization in order to ensure a fair and an equal working environment. The first step being analysing the internal and external environment continued by outlining the benefits that diversity can bring to a business. The benefits include social benefits, moral benefits and legal benefits along with business benefits which includes business reputation and image, positive employer brand and also employee benefits such as enhance creativity, value and respect for people. (Ingham, 2003) The third step is aligning and integrating the diversity policy with the overall corporate mission followed by the next step which is introducing diversity and equal opportunity policies in the HR policies such as Recruitment and Selection, Rewards, Induction, Training and Development. (Ingham, 2003) The fifth step is to ensure that the leaders and the top management implement diversity as a key factor in coaching and awareness training at all levels. (Ingham, 2003) The sixth and seventh step is involving the staff at all levels to, why such actions would not be tolerated and they would be classified as Gross misconduct and would be subject to disciplinary procedures and all such complaints and allegations will be solved and treated rapidly, seriously and confidentially. . (CIPD, 2007).

**Diversity Management –A Comparative Analysis**

Torrington et al, (2002) mentions the major differences between an equal opportunities approach and the management of diversity approach. The purpose of the equal
opportunities was to reduce discrimination based on gender, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, which has been discussed in the above paragraphs. In order to ensure equal opportunities to all, the equal opportunities commission and the commission for racial equality has been bestowed with the power to investigate any breach of the acts, the main ones being the race relations act 2000 and the equality act 2006 to serve a non discrimination notice on employers who are found guilty and also to undertake investigation and regular monitoring. (Torrington et.al, 2002). Most of the arguments presented in the equal opportunities have a moral and ethical basis and the responsibility to ensure that the equal opportunities have been practiced effectively lies with the HR/ Personnel function. (Torrington et.al, 2002)

Contrary to this, the concept of managing diversity is based on the belief that establishing a fair and a safe work place without any kind of discrimination is possible not just by focussing on gender, age or race etc which are rudimentary and irrelevant classifications but by focusing on a genuine understanding of ways in which individuals differ. (Torrington et.al, 2002). Based on this definition, it is quite apparent that the purpose of managing diversity is utilizing the potential of employees to the fullest advantage and not to reduce discrimination which is the purpose of the equal opportunities. Since in managing diversity, differences are seen as an advantage and the belief that the business will gain from promoting diversity the ultimate basis on which this concept operates is to improve profitability and achieve business objectives unlike the moral and ethical basis of equal opportunities. (Torrington et.al, 2002). Equal opportunities clearly focuses on groups of people who are discriminated whereas diversity management focuses on individuals and individual differences and hence under equal opportunities is only the disadvantaged or the discriminated employees who get benefited whereas diversity management has the scope of improving opportunities and benefits for all employees. (Torrington et.al, 2002). Equal opportunities can only be achieved by changing systems and practices like recruitment, legislations, putting equal opportunities higher on the agenda, awareness training etc. Whereas for diversity management the entire corporate culture of the organization needs to be changed. (Torrington et.al, 2002)

Managing Diversity And Accepting Differences

Managing diversity is one of the most important aspects of International Human Resource Management and one of the reasons which make International Human Resource Management more complex and demanding than Intra-National Management. The key concept of managing diversity is that different nations differ from each other on the basis of different dimensions which include the cultural values and norms, the social systems, and legal requirements. Since managing diversity involves managing cultural differences as one of the important features we start by analysing the significance of culture, globalisation and understanding the National cultural differences using Hofstede’s model. Culture is defined as a set of assumptions which consists of shared solutions to universal problems of external adaptation and internal integration. (Schein, 1985). To put it in simple words, culture is a set of values, beliefs, understandings and norms that the members of an organization adapt to and follow in the way they do things in the organization. Culture is manifested in two layers, the visible layer which include artefacts which comprise of art and architecture, dress code, symbols, logos, slogans, office layout etc. Rituals which include patterns of collective behaviour which have customary value such as functions, social courtesies. Behaviour which includes forms of address, communicational styles, emotional expressions etc and finally the invisible layers of culture which are the underlying values and beliefs which are deeply rooted than the visible layers which are deeply rooted assumptions.

Cultural Differences-A Business Case For Diversity

There are always debates on whether cultural differences really exist in this era of multiculturalism and globalised communication, but though in the surface the culture seems to be diverging, the under-rooted depths show that there are cultural distinctive among different cultures and it is these cultural distinctive that bring about competitive advantage, determine the success and failure in reaching cross-cultural markets. (Guirdham, 1999). The Hofstede model (Hofstede, 1991) which was developed based on cross-cultural research carried out at 66 national offices of IBM developed the most influential model which describes four major dimensions based on which national cultures differ and these four dimensions have an impact over all aspects of organisational behaviour and HRM such as leadership, motivation, team working etc.

The first dimension of Hofstede’s model is Power distance which is concerned about the distribution of power from the top to the bottom in the organisational hierarchy, cultures with High Power distance have centralised power where unilateral decisions are made by the top management and there is very limited participation and involvement of the subordinates or lower level workers in decision making whereas cultures with less power distance have decentralised power where authority and power is systematically distributed and devolved through the different layers in the organisational structure and subordinates are involved in decision making. (Mullins, 2007). Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) is the
extent to which security, order and control are preferred to ambiguity, uncertainty and change, in other words it is the extent to which an organisation takes risks and adapts itself to the external environment. Cultures with high UA fear risks and follow well defined rules and regulations, the policies and procedures are clearly defined and deviance from following the prescribed rules are considered intolerable and hence there is more stress whereas cultures with less UA are adaptable and greatly value flexibility and innovation. (Mullins, 2007) There is no task structure and clearly defined rules and regulations and hence it is subject to variability, hence people are not risk averse and hence they are stress free. Individualism is the extent to which people work and live together in groups (collectivistic) as opposed people who prefer to live and work individually. In cultures where there is high individualism, individual initiative and performance is rewarded, achievement of tasks is given more importance than task relationships, the management operates in an individual context and impersonality is the key principle in individualistic organisations whereas organisations with low individualism or collectivism where relationships and interdependence are more important than task achievement, the social acceptability and viewing the organisation in team context are the characteristics of collectivistic organisations. (Handy, 1993) Masculinity is the fourth dimension which is the extent to which social gender roles are distinct and this is not related to usual way masculinity and feminists is used. Cultures with High masculinity focus on masculine values such as assertiveness, achieving tasks, firm decision making and competition and the feminine values such as inter-relationships, welfare of employees, consensus and participation, tenderness etc are not given the prime importance whereas cultures with low masculinity focus on the feminine values which are mentioned above and give less importance to masculine values. (Mullins, 2007).

Hofstede placed each of these dimensions in a continuum and his findings clearly revealed that each nationality had significant differences, for e.g., the less developed Asian countries like India, Taiwan and Thailand were characterised by high power distance and medium masculinity whereas they were low in Uncertainty Avoidance and Individualism unlike Anglo countries like UK, US, Australia, Canada were characterised by low to medium power distance and low to medium Uncertainty Avoidance, whereas they were High in Individuality and Masculinity. Another model developed by Trompenaars (1997) on cultural differences emphasised the fact that certain cultures emphasise some values more than the others. Some interesting findings include countries like the middle east and south Europe are very affective in their approach which means they deal with issues emotionally and hence they freely and openly express emotions whereas countries like Japan, UK, China, Korea and Japan are very neutral in their approach and hence they deal with issues irrationally and unemotionally without any personal feelings and only concentrating on the goals. In some countries like North America, Norway and Germany, your achievement, status and recognition depends on your personal attributes whereas in countries like South America, Indonesia and Korea, the status and recognition of an individual is based on age, gender, background and other similar factors. In Trumpeters model another interesting observation is that in countries like France, Japan and UK, the future is determined from past trends, traditions, success stories in the history of the company whereas in the U.S and the Netherlands the future is seen to be created from a zero base or nothing. Hence managing these cultural differences becomes the greatest challenge in diversity management.

In order to manage these cultural differences and cultural diversity, the workforce and the management requires two aspects cultural sensitivity and cultural intentionality. Cultural sensitivity is nothing but being aware of or sensitive about the perceptual and behavioural differences that may arise because of cultural diversity and culture intentionality according to Ivey et al (1993) is defined as the ability to generate suitable and appropriate thoughts, actions and behaviour which are required to communicate and manage a diverse workforce. It is very important to analyse, evaluate and assess the effect and the impact of national or regional culture on performance of an individual employee. In order to exploit the full contribution of a diverse workforce, it is very important to avoid not just discrimination and Harassment but also the disempowerment of people belonging to different cultures. Hence the ‘managing diversity’ concept should always imply the need to be proactive and think and manage the needs of a diverse workforce in areas beyond equal opportunities, discrimination and harassment. The areas include the capacity of tolerating and accepting individual differences, communicating effectively through suitable channels and motivating with appropriate and suitable rewards in order to meet the expectations of a culturally diverse workforce, understanding workers belonging to different family structures and responsibilities and managing accordingly, compromising and introducing flexibility to meet the needs of the ageing workforce, understanding that each individual has different career aspirations and prefers different career paths and training the staff appropriately, being aware of the existing literacy, innumeracy and qualifications problems of the international workforce and managing cooperative working and building team spirit in ethnically diverse teams. (Kramer et al, 1997)
Recommendations And Conclusion:
According to the analysis made on equal opportunities and diversity management, the strategic plan on diversity based on Pitney Bowes model has been formulated along with a practical action plan. (Kramer et al, 1997). In order to exploit the advantages of diversity, the following strategies has to be adopted, provide an open, supportive and flexible work environment that values the potential differences and uniqueness of each individual employee through its leadership and management, communication strategies, & recruitment and training programs. This is to promote the understanding of individual differences which covers but are not limited to gender, race, cultural values, religious beliefs, age, disability and sexual orientation. The strategic plan covers five goals, which are Communication, Education and Training, career development, recruitment hiring and work-life balance. In order to foster effective communication to a diverse work force, the following strategies can be implemented which are forming specific diversity councils throughout the company, engaging in a vast and wide spread promotional activities and campaigns which promote diversity and finally developing diversity marketing guidelines for the products and the services offered.

Under Education and training, there is a strong need to understand the value of differences and this can be brought about by offering a range of training opportunities which stimulate increase diversity awareness in the work force. It can also be brought about by identifying high profile potential customers who have the ability of speaking with employees on diversity issues. The actions that can be carried out under career development include introducing an innovative succession planning process that is based on assessing future competencies, increasing opportunities for cross national training and rotational assignments, introducing employee mentoring and coaching programmes and also increasing participation and also designing a career networking directory and publishing it.

The next diversity promotional measure can be through recruitment and hiring by developing recruitment campaigns and specific recruitment from schools, colleges, universities and other places with diverse populations giving out Ethnic minority scholarships introducing internship programmes to facilitate the diversity agenda and finally giving bonuses to the management if the diversity recruitment goals are attained.

The final goal is achieving work-life balance by providing a flexible and enjoyable work environment which suits the needs of a diverse work force. Some of the strategies under work-life balance are developing training to enhance flexibility, work practices expanding child care, elderly care and school referral programmes, supporting healthcare, having Telecommuting work from home programmes and finally conducting employee surveys on work-life balance.

References And Bibliography