Impact of Work Force Diversity on Work Culture of Indian Organizations

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ABSTRACT

"Understand the differences; act on the commonalities."
-Andrew Masondo, African National Congress

“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities”
— Stephen R. Covey

Today at the beginning of the 21st century, the world is inundated with a wide range of demographic trends, which have the prospective to drastically change the demographic, cultural and ethical mixture of the population in many countries within just a few decades. Innovation and diversity are both multidimensional terms and definitions for them are as varied as the number of academic disciplines, policy makers, and business leaders that specialize in them. Innovation leads to economic development, productivity, competitive advantage etc. of any organization. Innovation to take place there must be people who can think differently and can find new solutions to overcoming the challenges and the competition from the other counterparts because of this most of the corporate bodies today are focusing much on employing people from diversified backgrounds, who always can find the new ways of solving problems.

Diversity is important in today’s business environment for several reasons, including the necessity of compliance with anti-discrimination laws, an increasingly multicultural world and a recognition that different perspectives are important, Diversity in many ways is very much related to another term that we see generally used nowadays, which is ‘change’. Managing diversity is a crucial part of change management. If Indian companies have to flourish in today’s shifting global market place, it has to learn to manage diversity, both within the company and without. Due to the diversity and diversified work culture organizations will stand as High Performing Organizations (HPOs), over the other companies which do not possess people from different backgrounds. In many Indian organizations due to the globalization of the economy, there is a transformation of work culture too. In this context, this paper concentrates on influence of diversity on the organizational work culture, and the behavior of Indian organizations towards work culture and diversity had been discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Culture, Diversity, Globalization, High Performing Organizations, Work Culture, Workforce.

Introduction
The world's increasing globalization requires more interaction among people from diverse cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds than ever before. The global work culture is best characterized by two words, “change and diversity”. As the globe is becoming a small village and the distance between the countries were narrowing down day-by-day, the organizations are expanding their business operations in various countries. People no longer live and work in an insular marketplace; they are now part of a worldwide economy with competition coming from nearly every continent. For this reason, profit and non-profit organizations need diversity to become more creative and open to change. They are carrying their workforce, management practices, work culture etc. to the other countries. Though they have to adapt to the host country’s work culture and environment, they are reflecting their own culture as a basis for engaging with other cultures. In both the situations, these organizations were trying to gain some competency over the other organizations.

Competencies in cross-cultural organizations are crucial to understand how to serve and retain a customer(s) or an employee(s), who are now much more diverse and demanding than in past. Before, going through the diversity and its influence on the organizational work culture, even though they were not new for us, it’s important to first understand -
What is a culture, what is work culture and what is diversity?

Culture is the learned beliefs, attitudes, values, customs and traditions that are common to a group of people. It is dynamic and transmitted to others and it is the shared qualities of a group that make them unique. It exists at various levels like - national level, regional level, gender level, generation level, social class level, and also at organizational, departmental, corporate levels.

Work culture may be defined as the rules/regulations, traditions/rituals, policies, practices and values/beliefs of an organization. It can be seen in the way of life of a group of people at the workplace. In organizations, we find three types of cultures namely, culture of differentiation, culture of unity, and culture of integration. It is because; the organizational workforce is the composed with the people having all the above said differences. It is nothing but, “Diversity”.

In India even people from neighboring states are as different as trying to compare Karnataka to Italy when considering language, style of dress, cultural dances, etc. As per studies in India the language and culture changes every 100 kilometers. From a media planning perspective, there are 5,600 daily newspapers, 15,000 weekly newspapers, and 20,000 magazines in 21 languages across the country that planners must negotiate through when planning their media buys. To keep up with the shifting needs of the world and to succeed India Inc's should keep in mind not only the demographics at their corporate levels, but also at organizational, departmental, social class level, and at organizational, corporate levels.

A diverse workplace makes excellent business sense of attracting employees from a wide range of possible backgrounds, so that the talented and quality workforce can be selected by the organizations, which enable them to grow personally and make the most of their roles in the organization. In turn, the diversity is turning as a competitive advantage for them. But, to achieve this, the organizations must avoid discrimination against the various sections of the workforce by making policies. Right from F.W. Taylor the focus was on productivity and stimulates workers to contribute more the tool used was incentivisation. Diverse perspectives enrich quality idea generation, creativity and strong business performance. It creates a positive work culture by establishing an environment that supports and nurtures the two-way and up-and-down communication and creates a diverse workplace that values both similarities and differences. Diversity ultimately translates to higher performance in the workplace, as a result of motivated individuals who are enthusiastic and committed to work. So, by having a diversified workforce the organization can grow and stand as HPOs.

Diversity influences the work culture to that extent to which it brings quick transform into the organisational work setup. But, changing a culture will never easy. Some of the key organizational practices such as; defining and promoting professional standards along with corporate planning, career planning of an individual employee has got paramount importance. Individual needs, aspirations, counseling, individual development program/s, harmonization of organizational needs and opportunities as well as threats are becoming important, encouraging teamwork and understanding between employees will make the workplace more pleasant, efficient and inclusive. These practices have the potential to promote a safe work environment and culture by engendering greater cooperativeness between all the employees. It can be happened...
through diversity in the workforce. People are required to work in teams. A greater creativity, wider perspective and increased effectiveness in tackling problem is desired by organization however the dominance of one culture within team reduces the value of whole teams contribution. Employers should assist new employees to adapt to the workplace diversity and culture; otherwise it will be a great problem.

The organization's values, vision, mission, policies, procedures, and norms should constitute a culture that is manifested in multiple perspectives and adaptability to varying values, beliefs, communication styles etc... Diversity acknowledges and uses inherent differences to drive innovation as a way of creating better organizational performance and competitive advantage. The diverse culture in the organisations brings numerous changes in how the external and internal people look at it, which could affect the goodwill of the organization in terms of customers and Employee loyalty, suppliers, competitors etc. Majority of the organizations agreed that the diversity is important for them, as it gives various advantages and benefits. A few advantages were listed below.

a) Diversity brings different styles of working, experience and expertise to the workplace, thereby enhancing work practices and productivity.

b) Diversity can enhance innovation, creativity and problem solving abilities of the workforce, by bringing together various perspectives and ideas.

c) A shared responsibility for the assignments and a shared commitment to goals.

d) Diversity makes good sense for profitability by promoting inclusiveness.

e) Diversity brings improved performance through broader knowledge, experience & expertise.

f) A willingness to respond to changes and take on risks.

g) Diverse teams make it possible to enhance flexibility and rapid response & adaptability to change.

Besides, the above benefits of diversity, it influences the work culture in many other ways. It brings a positive change in the mindset of the employees & management and also promotes a friendly atmosphere at the workplace, reduces conflicts and facilitates cooperation among employees of different backgrounds, which leads to increases in the productivity. When an organization promotes this type of diversified work culture, it receives appreciation form the external world, and tends to attract people who are looking for it. It motivates employees, reduces employee turnover and encourages employee engagement. But, the organization must take utmost care while recruiting people from diverse backgrounds because they have different skills and abilities which many times may not be directly useful for the organizations, they are needed to convert them in favor of the organizations through diversified training programs. However we have to think about other problems. There may be conflicts among team members caused by various human feelings and responses or time and energy spent on developing a team community and appropriate culture.

Today, the organizations have begun to lay greater emphasis on teamwork; because they want their employees to be effective in groups besides being efficient individually. A common misconception people have about teams is assuming that the negative contributions they observe are due to flawed personality of one team member. However the team members’ behavior is driven by organizational roles and responsibilities. Diversity often helps in forming of a worth full teams for achieving of organisational goals by ensuring greater transparency of operations and facilitates easier communication among various people working in the same as well as in different locations. This promotes a feeling of oneness and eliminates physical barriers. Many employers think that the homogenous work groups can only have team spirit as they all posses’ similar qualities and contributes to the organisational success, but it is not always true, even the heterogeneous work groups have good understanding and co-operate each other for achieving of both individual and organisational goals with well established team work and spirit. Thus, diversity fosters a “We” spirit and can often contribute to the synergy which in turn can make the organization more productive. The diversified workforce will have a major impact on various workplace aspects which will influence the work culture of the organisations.

Some of the following change can be seen in the organisational work culture due to diversity in workforce.

a) Enhanced morale, job satisfaction and productivity by recognizing of the individuals’ skills and abilities.
b) Increased innovation, creativity and share ideas by having an effective communication system.

c) Friendly and supportive work environment and promotes team spirit.

d) Potential to enhance emotional intelligence and create a more balanced workforce.

e) Increasing automation at the workplace and flexibility in working hours.

It should be noted that, the diversity brings both opportunities as well as challenges, as it changes the work culture drastically. So, in order to grab the opportunities they have to overcome various challenges like conflicts between employees and employers, employees and management etc. We have to as a time leader, remember to enjoy the communal fun and the exhilaration of shared victories. Thus, the diversity in the organization must be properly managed by the HR managers. Managing diversity means enabling the diverse workforce to perform at its full potential in an equitable work environment, where no one group has an advantage or disadvantage.

Effective diversity management ensures that all factors are in place to provide for and to encourage the continuous development of a diverse workforce by melding the actual and perceived differences among the workers to achieve maximum productivity. It refers to a model of inclusion of all the employees in both formal company programs and informal networks to avoid discrimination against any one particular class of employees in the total workforce. It accepts the need to value the contribution of employees from diverse backgrounds, who can increase productivity, international competitiveness and so on. It also facilitates balance in recruitment of workforce by following the laws of equal employment opportunities for avoiding discrimination against persons with disabilities, women, age old persons, people from different races, castes etc…. It was intended to correct the imbalance induced by decades of social injustice.

**Diversity Culture and Indian Organization**

The Indian civilization is one of the oldest and richest with a great deal of diversity in thoughts, beliefs, creeds, and deep appreciation of values. The diversity is an important feature of India. It contains more diversity as a continent does, so, it is called as sub-continent. As the organisations draw the workforce from the society, there will be changes the work culture and profile of the organisation accordingly and the work culture is rooted deeply in their societal culture. The Indian work and management culture had acknowledged the differences in size, ownership and branch characteristics of the organisation. In spite of availability of diversified workforce the Indian organisations and in the Indian society, some organisations are not in a position to tap the advantages from it. It is because of, some discrimination shown with respect to age, gender, disabilities etc… and due to this; the talented workforce has been often neglected. Further, rapid industrial and economy growth in India, and due to liberalization, globalization and privatization policy, most of the foreign industrialists were started entering into the country, paving way for even more diversified work culture and diversity in Indian society. Now, it is becoming a great challenge for both the Indian as well as the foreign organisations to deal with diversity.

The foreign organisations are striving hard for understanding the socio-cultural aspects of the Indian work culture and management practices for improving their effectiveness. The entry of the foreign organisations’ affected the work culture / environment of the Indian organizations’ too in many ways, especially in Indian private sector. Some of the major areas affected are like - working hours (people working more in night shifts and in flexible timings), five working days in a week, increase of women and aged people employment, organisational structures, pay structures, composition of workforce, work from home, and so on. Slowly, both the Indian as well as foreign companies were started adopting the work culture of each other. It is making a balance between Indian and foreign work cultures. Even, it is forcing the government to make changes in the labor legislations accordingly for inclusion of more diversified workforce and culture. As the change is essence of life, the organisational work culture is also changing, but importantly it is sending good signals for those organisations which are valuing diversity.

There is a need to understand that we must always have a consumer centric approach. It is about maximizing productivity and enabling consumers to enjoy always a connected lifestyle. Teams often seem a natural and easy solution for improving collaboration and productivity in knowledge based organizations but the transitions to teams can be difficult. Interpersonal conflicts are common in today’s team environment one must know the art and skill for recognizing and dealing with difficult personality types. A team sometimes produces great
result and at times is big failures. It depends on how teams are managed & organization really supports teamwork.

**Conclusion**

Globalization had opened the doors of opportunity for many business men around the world to do business in other countries. The extent to which managers recognize diversity and its potential advantages and disadvantages defines an organization’s approach to managing the diversity. No organisation in this world of globalization would survive without workforce diversity. The places where they are operating have different cultures, traditions and values that are important to the people who live there and they should never intend to overrun those cultures.

Diversity is not a case of representation of different nationalities or ethnicities. It is a process of creating greater wealth through increased creativity and productivity. Consistent internal communication and employee education is vital to gain support of all the stake holders. To the extent possible they have to try and manage their practices in a way that they respect the core principles of the given country or organization or culture. It is also very important to have a proper diversity management mechanism in the organizations for avoiding the discrimination. The management and leaders must not lose focus and interest in creating a diverse workforce – due to the lack of immediate returns.

Today, diversity has been identified as one of the key drivers for sustaining competitive advantage. At the same time, it is also a big challenge for the organizations; so, they should train and educate their managers and supervisors on valuing and managing diversity. Thus, the diversified workforce will bring both opportunities as well as challenges to the organization, if not properly managed. It will have both positive and negative impacts on work culture. Most of the organizations experienced success through diversified work culture by identifying innovated ways of problem solving and facing challenges.

HBR July 2000 “Jim King” in his article Tension in Teams started… some experts suggest using team conflict to encourage creative solutions. For this to work, team leaders need to set ground rules such as confronting conflict directly and not allowing it to get a team back on tracks, re-engineering teams, building strategic relationship, building trust, resolving conflicts, problem solving and measuring teams worth. Alvin Toffler wrote in “Third Wave” Instead of “ single bottom line” the corporation requires multiple bottom lines – social, environmental, informational, political and ethical all of them interconnected.” Will McInnis writes in “Cultural Shocks” we have to start operating…… “to the less measurable but more meaningful like providing purpose and satisfaction to people & making the world more sustainable.”

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