

Human Capital

Key Challenges to an Inclusive policy

Date: 21/06/2016 | Edition: National | Page: 36 | Source: Ajay Kolla | Clip size (cm): W: 45 H: 56

Clip: 1 of 3

Key Challenges to an Inclusive policy

The key to diversity is not the differences amongst individuals alone, but their own perception of themselves and the others in the light of these differences.

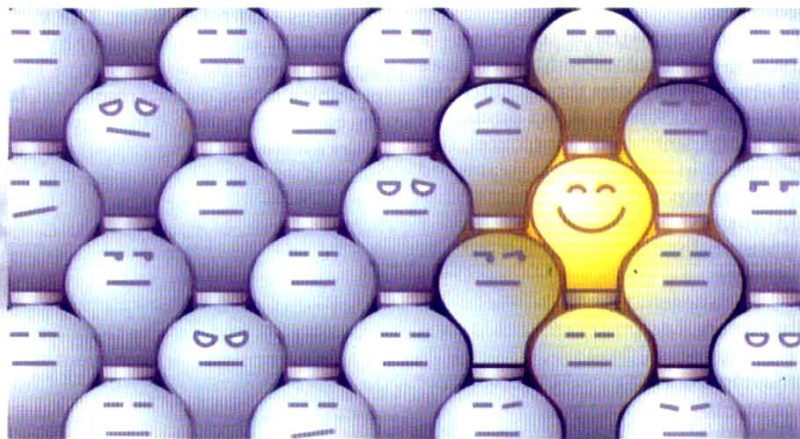
- BY AJAY KOLLA

Several organizations today make diversity a key parameter in their hiring agenda. While the benefits of diversity in the workplace are indisputable, it also presents a new set of challenges to the organization. HR practitioners are required to handle these challenges in an appropriate manner, and ensure that the benefits of diversity are not overshadowed by the challenges.

Workplace diversity encompasses differences within the organization in terms of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, cultural beliefs, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background and so on and so forth. The key to diversity is not the differences amongst individuals alone, but their own perception of themselves and the others in the light of these differences. In order to be functioning in an effective manner, the organization must ensure cordial interactions among the employees, and HR needs to focus on issues such as change and communication adaptability.

In order to deal with the challenges of diversity at the work place, organizations are required to modify their management policies. They must develop novel and creative approaches to manage the demographic changes such as enhancing the number of women at the workplace, and incorporate the legislation of equal opportunity that accompanies it.

Among other things that have contributed to diversity at the workplace are rise in dual income families, and, an increase in the number of single working mothers. This has hit a bump owing to downsizing, outsourcing, globalization, and the adoption of new technologies and automation.



Why be diverse?

Before we look at the challenges arising out of a diverse workplace, let us focus on the relevance of diversity and the reasons for promoting it. Diversity can be beneficial for both the employer as well as the employee. It can help in increasing marketing and recruitment opportunities, foster creativity, and improve the business image. In addition, it can bring about a positive bearing on the productivity due to the proliferation of diverse thought processes and viewpoints. In fact, this works to enhance the ability of the organization to handle any situation effectively. As long as the company handles diversity in a healthy and a competent manner, it shall be witnessing a sense of togetherness among the employees, and an air of harmony within the workplace.

What is driving diversity at the workplace?

According to a recent study, an estimated 400 Million women employees are working in various

verticals; and in the IT sector, women constitute thirty percent of the workforce. Initiatives by companies to retain and increase the proportion of women employees such as increasing the paid maternity leave, offering sabbaticals etc. are beginning to show results.

Some of the major factors driving diversity in organizations are:

- Rise in the number of female employees
- Rise in work place mobility
- Rise in the size of the young work force
- Rise in the proportion of ethnic minorities
- Rise in global roles

Challenges faced due to diversity

To manage the challenges created by diversity, organizations have to start by identifying the value of differences, combating the discrimination caused by them, and promoting inclusiveness. Diversity can lead to the development

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Date: 21/06/2016 | Edition: National | Page: 37 | Source: Ajay Kolla | Clip size (cm): W: 45 H: 56

Clip: 2 of 3

CHALLENGES OWING TO DIVERSITY



of behavioural changes such as prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. This in fact, results in fallouts like a stressed work environment, departmental complaints and further presents legal complications the organization.

Employees who are averse to diversity can affect the workplace morale, disrupt working relationships and thereby hamper productivity. This often has a domino effect on the organization's hiring, retention, and termination practices.

Some major challenges resulting from increasing diversity at the work place and their impact-

Communication barriers- This might result from perceptual, cultural and language barriers. Ineffective communication results in confusion, lack of teamwork, and low morale. When individuals from different cultural groups communicate, there are chances of misinterpreting tone, body language and meaning. The most common case is of employees who do not speak the common language, and therefore feel excluded. If left unaddressed, this over a time span, translates into a poor organizational fit and underperformance.

Resistance to change- It is a great challenge for human resource

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professionals to implement diversity programmes because of the fact that most employees will refuse to accept the fact that the social and cultural makeup of their workplace is changing. They reject new ideas and inhibit cultural integration. Organizations need to handle their concerns and their assimilation into a changing workplace environment carefully. Sessions that explain the need and benefits of diversity may be helpful in this regard. Managers tend to face challenges when new employees from diverse backgrounds interact with long-

standing employees. Many companies are providing training sessions to managers to manage their new diverse workforce.

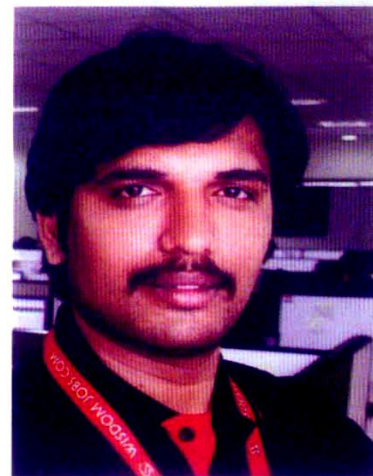
Implementation of diversity in workplace policies- Companies face challenges while implementing their diversity plans. In most cases, it requires experienced professionals specialized in diversity management to understand the challenges and the long-term implications of implementing a diversity policy. Companies must follow affirmative action plans to develop and implement a successful diversity strategy. Organizations must develop a plan, analyze results and make necessary changes if results are not along expected lines. It is always a great challenge to build and implement a customized strategy to maximize the effects of diversity in the workplace. To overcome such issues, it is required to prepare employee assessments and research data for pertinent to the organization. Diversity cannot thrive without a supportive management.

Implementing a successful diversity plan

How does an organization define diversity? Is it the difference among groups or the differences among individuals? How do they sensitize Managers to the consequences of discrimination and enable them to recognize their own cultural biases and prejudices in order to solve the challenges due to diversity at work place? How does the top management devise the best diversity ideas that can complement their vision about the success of the organization in the future? For example, as a solution to a situation mentioned earlier in this article, should organizations hire bilingual employees who can mediate and reduce language and communication barriers?

The challenges that organizations face today are to integrate diversity management into their broad recruitment processes, to develop fair selection processes, and to provide orientation programmes to existing employees to motivate diversity.

Managers should expect the change to be slow. Providing effective mentoring programmes with an access to



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information and opportunities may mitigate the challenges faced due to diversity. The employees on their part must pitch in by accepting constructive, critical feedback to overcome challenges associated with accepting diversity.

Success in overcoming workplace diversity issues can push people to grow, improving productivity and employee relationships, decreasing workplace tension and resulting in a positive place to work.

Changing business trends and world markets demand an organization's workforce to be competitive in the market. Creating equal opportunities and respecting individual differences at the workplace can develop a competitive edge and increase productivity. Diversity management practices benefit both by creating a transparent environment and providing access to the opportunities and challenges.

However, organizations need to develop, implement, and maintain ongoing training because one-off or short-term engagement won't change people's behavior. Training should be an ongoing process as it educates each employee about diversity issues, laws and regulations. Organization diversity strategies are considered as more than equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. Organizations need to practice the strategies to adapt to a diverse workforce and be successful in the future.

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Date: 21/06/2016 | Edition: National | Page: 4 | Source: Ajay Kolla | Clip size (cm): W: 45 H: 56

Clip: 3 of 3

36 Key Challenges to an Inclusive policy
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