



## Workforce Diversity Management as a Key to Improve Productivity: A review article

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### Abstract

*Studies on the workforce diversity and its management has progressively been blooming over the last two decades and now firmly positioned among the hot and burning issues in the field of Human Resource Management and its practice. This conceptual review paper is an attempt to create and elaborate an understanding on the important concepts of diversity, its management and workforce productivity. Moreover the relationship between diversity management, job satisfaction and productivity is explored in depth. Problems presently facing the theoretical side of the diversity management literature also presented in this paper. Finally, this review article calls for an alternative approaches to studying diversity on the basis of critical literature analysis.*

**Keywords:** Diversity, productivity, workforce

### 1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization the workforce is becoming progressively more diverse in the world of work and it is by far more imperative than ever for organizations to assume varieties of diversity management strategies. Through properly understanding and managing workforce diversity, companies will be able to create a competitive advantage in the market. On the other hand, incorrect prospection of workforce diversity would result into negative effect and thus diversity is seen as a "double-edged sword" (Milliken and Martins, 1996). While many literatures agree on the importance of workforce diversity saying, 'it is positively associated with creativity, problem-solving skills, a wider range of perspectives, better problem definition and solutions', Some other literatures contends work place diversity as 'a source of disagreements, emotional conflicts, reduction in creativity, innovation, quality, and performance of employees and organizations ultimately leading to negative effects on the team performance (Jehn, 1994, 1995; Amason, 1996; De Dreu and Vande, 1997; Friedman et al., 2000; Passos and Caetano, 2005). However, the concept of diversity management rests on the paybacks to be gained from recognizing workforce differences and similarities at work place (Armstrong, 2009).

Thus this review article intends to create and elaborate an understanding on workforce diversity management and productivity. How proper workforce diversity management increases productivity at workplace? It examines whether the relationship between workforce diversity and productivity is sufficiently explored in past? How accurate and consistent the results are? What are the findings of those studies? What are the short comings of those studies? What



aspects of diversity and productivity need to be discussed further? To answer these questions, previous studies on the topics will be assessed and reviewed in detail.

## 2. Methodology

This study is a qualitative literature review on the concepts of workforce diversity management, job satisfaction, productivity and the relationship between them. It is purely conceptual as it relies on journal articles, books, conference proceedings and websites for secondary data. In the following sections, relevant studies are summed up under headings of, the concept of diversity; advantages and disadvantages of diversity; the concept of workforce productivity; workforce diversity management; diversity management and job satisfaction; the relationship between diversity management and productivity. Finally, concluding remarks about the reviewed studies and future research directions are stated at the end.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 The Concept of Diversity

Thomas Friedman (2005) in his book entitled ‘The World is flat’ mentioned the ten major forces that flattened the world. He says, because the world is flattening and shrinking we are going to see every color of the human rainbow and much more diverse people from every corner of the flat world. Let us look at glance on the earlier studies on the concept of workforce diversity.

The term diversity is recently used in many studies that are concerned with differences among the workforces at workplace just to describe all types of surface level and deep level dimensions such as role, function and personality (Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000). The primary elements that differs individuals from one another as mentioned in Joplin and Daus, 1997; Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000; Kersten, 2000; Triandis, 2003 are age, gender, sexual orientation, social class, culture, ethnicity, disability, education, beliefs, experiences, and race. On the other hand literatures classify workforce diversity at workplace as personal related diversity and organizational related diversity. Personal related diversity includes surface level variables that are related to such variables as race, skin color, gender, etc., or deep level variables such as values, personality, attitudes and beliefs. Organization related diversity variables are such variables as tenure, position and technical skills. Alderfer and Smith (1982); Kossek and Zonia (1993) intergroup theory in which group is categorized as identity groups and organizational group is similar with the above categorization.

Workforce diversity refers to ‘the composition of work units (work group, organization, occupation, establishment or firm) in terms of the cultural or demographic characteristics that are salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members’ (DiTomaso et al., 2007). With the major changes taking place in the today’s world of work the root and the concern for workforce diversity is now becoming incredibly wide and the management concern on the issue is becoming matter of survival. Recognizing, valuing and properly managing the diverse workforce and developing competitive advantage for better productivity and competition or ignoring and confronting all the negative consequences. Chanda (2006) studied on driving diversity management and mentioned workforce diversity as a hot and burning issue in every organization of current scenario and therefore advised human resource managers to take care in managing this diversity. He also concluded that there exists lack of awareness



towards diversity management approach, the managers don't have sufficient knowledge and competency to manage diversified workforce.

### **3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Diversity**

There is no denying the mounting empirical and anecdotal evidence that good diversity management can lead to improved business performance where the business contexts and market conditions are taken into account appropriately (CIPD, May 2005). Meaning, if properly managed, diversity will bring positive outcomes for an organization. Hon and Brunner (2000); Friedman and Amoo (2002) portrayed diversity as an essential instrument of generating new ideas, and learning and growth. It can add value if managed effectively (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Knouse and Dansby, 1999), linked positively to decision-making, creativity, innovation, and better service (Cox, 1991), diversity enables firms for flexible strategic fit (Laursen/Mahnke/Vejrup-Hansen, 2004) and it can be a source of learning and creativity, and it is an opportunity for personal promotion and organizational profitability (De Meuse and Hostager, 2001). Understanding the different demands and expectations of diversified markets, group decision-making, group interaction, and innovation are some of the several expected positive outcomes of diversity for an organization (Knouse and Dansby, 1999). A positive diversity climate in an organization is vital and consequently should be seen as a strategic focus area of leadership (Joplin and Daus, 1997; Combs, 2002). Thus the positive forces of diversity are those that:

- ▶ Promote cost-effective employment relations
- ▶ Enhance customer relations
- ▶ Enhance creativity, flexibility and innovation
- ▶ Promote sustainable development and business advantage.

Conversely, poorly developed and poorly matched diversity practice can be detrimental to business, creating without gain, raising expectations without delivery, and increasing cost without benefit (CIPD, May 2005). Cox (1991) says, diversity if not properly handled leads to drawbacks such as interpersonal conflicts, high employee turnover and communication breakdown. Several studies imply that, workforce homogeneity improves trust, enhances communication, and improves reciprocal relations (Mor Barak et al, 1998). In addition a decline in communication and cohesiveness with an increase in heterogeneity between groups was observed (Cox, 1991). Diversity implementation is believed by the privileged groups to threaten their positions (Kossek/Zonia, 1993). Fear of differences, having stereotyped predispositions, a belief that it is unfair, a belief that it is a threat to career and performance development, and a belief that it is threat to profitability are among the major reasons mentioned for resisting diversity (Cox, 1993; De Meuse and Hostager, 2001). Thus the negative forces of diversity are:

- ▶ Diminishing cultural relatedness
- ▶ The need for financial support to support flexibility
- ▶ The jeopardizing of workplace harmony
- ▶ Possible conflict between organizational slack and tight fit

However, other studies revealed that the diversity in heterogeneous groups decreases through time after they start working together because of social contact between the more tenured members and the new members (Jackson et al., 1991). Initially a homogeneous group might



perform better, but through time with the experience of working together, diverse groups perform better and become more problem solving and innovative (Knouse and Dansby, 1999).

### **3.3 The Concept of Workforce Productivity**

Workforce productivity remains a primary element for success in most organizations (Haenisch, 2012). Workforce productivity can be defined as a measure of the quantity and quality of work done, considering the cost of the resources used (Mathis & Jackson, 2010). It shows whether the activity of an organization is efficient and effective (Saxena, 2014). In some cases the terms productivity, efficiency and effectiveness are used interchangeably by practitioners who sometimes alternate their meanings. However we must not identify productivity with efficiency and/or effectiveness. Productivity requires both efficiency and effectiveness, because a certain activity will not be productive if it is only efficient, but not effective, or effective, but not efficient. Economists define productivity as the relation between output which consists of a given product, service and the amount of both and input which consists of resources used in the product creation process, such as labor, materials, energy. It is also defined as a measure of the efficiency of a person, system, machine, factory, etc., in converting inputs into outputs. There are many different ways of measuring productivity. For example, in a factory productivity might be measured based on the number of hours it takes to produce a good, while in the service sector productivity might be measured based on the revenue generated by an employee divided by his/her salary (Ibid). In general, productivity is a measure of efficiency in production; how much output is obtained from a given set of inputs (Al-Abri, 2017).

### **3.4 Workforce Diversity Management**

In recent years greater attention has been given to the management of diversity due to demographic changes in the workforce; wider customer base; equal employment opportunities legislation; a shortage of higher-level skills; affirmative action programs and positive discrimination; increasing number of women and part-time workers entering the workforce; changing social attitudes; a more global environment and increasing internationalization.

Diversity management refers to a set of managerial actions aimed at either increasing diversity, and/or promoting amicable, productive working relationships. It is the ability of a manager to achieve success for an organization by making the best of use of the similarities and differences among employees in terms of age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, as well as in terms of personality, values, attitudes, perception and cognitive style (Miebi, 2014). Despite decades of practice and increased attention, criticism has been raised that little real progress has been made toward promoting better working relationships across differences in the workplace (Jonsen, et. al., 2011). Managing diversity in contemporary organization is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach; its initiatives must be in consonance with organizational missions to be successful. That is, it must be integrated into the agency's overall operating plans and strategies. The aim will be to create an institutional environment in which every person that is different, in terms of human characteristics, feels not only accepted but also respected and valued (Ewoh, 2013). A policy on managing diversity recognizes that there are dissimilarities amongst workers and that these disparities, if appropriately managed will facilitate work to be done more efficiently and



effectively. It does not focus solely on issues of discrimination but instead focus on recognizing the dissimilarities among people. As described by Kandola and Fullerton (1994), the concept of managing diversity ‘is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone will feel valued, where their talents are fully utilized, and in which organizational goals are met’. Its aim is to harness the diversity for sustaining or enhancing organizational effectiveness. This is an absolutely legitimate aim for business (Srinivasan, 2015).

According to the access and legitimacy paradigm of workforce diversity management, companies must accept and celebrate the differences in their workforce so that the diversity within the company matches the diversity found among the companies primary stakeholders such as customers, suppliers and the community. Thus this concept in the access and legitimacy paradigm necessitates the employment of diversified workforce for every organization. Saha and Patra (2008), focused on the requirements due to globalized market and benefits of workforce diversity. They said that if the organization is not employing the diversified workforce then that organization is not competitive enough. Elsaid (2012) explains the requirements of global economy saying that organizations should have a diverse workforce so that they can effectively deal with an increasingly diverse customer base and further elucidate diversity management as an important tool that any organization should implement. According to Jeffrey Gandz (1998) increasingly diverse workforces are required in order to understand and respond to the needs and aspirations of increasingly diverse customers. Diversity in the workforce, at all levels, is essential if these customer needs are to be translated into products and services effectively and efficiently. Daniel A. Sauers (1990’s) described that companies that do a good job of managing cultural diversity stand to gain such advantages as: hiring and retaining the best of the new labor pool, achieving better performance among female and minority workers, gaining access to greater innovation through better decision making, and gaining the ability to make the most of ethnic and international markets.

### **3.5 Diversity management and job satisfaction**

Empirical studies confirmed that efforts towards diversity management can enhance positive outcomes such as increased employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and improved organizational performance (Choi, 2009; Choi & Rainey, 2010; Pitts, 2009). It is believed that policies and programs that promote representative bureaucracy and leadership in order to integrate employees of different backgrounds will help employees reduce relational conflicts or resolve them peacefully (Choi and Rainy, 2014). Employees’ perception of being accepted by the organization will improve their job satisfaction (Roberts & O’Reilly, 1979) and their commitment to the organization (O’Reilly et al., 1989). Choi and Rainy (2014) focused on organizational fairness, diversity management and its effect on job satisfaction and concluded that, diversity management combined with just and fair organizational procedures relate to more favorable results such as higher employee job satisfaction. They further explained that, where effective diversity management and organizational fairness are jointly present; the positive influence on employee job satisfaction is even stronger.





### **3.6 The Relationship between Diversity, Diversity Management and Productivity**

In today's scenario workforce diversity is a necessity for the development, both in terms of economic growth and satisfactory intellectual, emotional and moral existence (Jakob Lauring, 2009). Lauring (2009) further explained that managed differences of skills and shared knowledge, is an important aspect to improve productivity among the organization which is guided by social interaction. A multicultural organization is better suited to serve a diverse external clientele in a more increasingly global market. Such organizations have a better understanding of the requirements of the legal, political, social, economic and cultural environments of foreign nations (Adler, 1991). In research-oriented and hi-tech industries, the broad base of talents generated by a gender and ethnic-diverse organization becomes a priceless advantage. "Creativity thrives on diversity" (Morgan, 1989). Hiring diversified workforce will definitely lead to improved productivity, but may prove to disaster if not managed properly because not only the management but employees are also feeling some problems like language problem (which is acceptable and is not due to thoughts of the employees), attitude clashes, and difference in perceptions, which is directly related to human behavior which ultimately affects the productivity of any organization (Saxena, 2014). Organizations that view diversity as part of their key strategy rather than a business expense will benefit far greater than the organization that does not, and will reap the benefit of cost reduction in attrition and increased revenues (Brown, 2008).

Brunow & Nijkamp (2016) found significant positive effects of cultural diversity on productivity and revenues for culturally diverse high-skilled workers. Different skills and experience, problem solution aspects, and cultural-specific knowledge of employed high-skilled workforce give firms a competitive advantage. Roberson & Park (2007) focused on predicting the relationship between diversity reputation and firm performance. The result of the study shown a significant positive relationship between diversity reputation and book-to-market equity, which suggests that being recognized as one of the top companies for diversity and diversity management may serve as an effective signal to investors about a firm's future earnings prospects. Herring (2009) focused on identifying the value in diversity and concluded that, diversity is good for businesses because it increases productivity and offers a direct return on investment, promising greater corporate profits and earnings. Bartz et.al., (1990) studied on a model for managing workforce diversity and found that proper management of workforce diversity will result in better products delivered in a timelier manner because the assets of employees will be more fully utilized. Effective management of diversity will also improve morale and job satisfaction, while increasing the number of employees who reach their full performance potential. This means that the end results of a good diversity management are positive and benefits both the employees and the organization.

## **4. Conclusion and Future research direction**

### **4.1 Conclusion**

From the in-depth review of past studies on workforce diversity management and productivity; it can be concluded that even though there is controversies (double-edged sword), most of the literatures agreed as a proper management of workforce diversity would result into better productivity and job satisfaction. The studies further explained the relationship between



diversity, productivity and job satisfaction saying, ‘managers through recognizing, valuing and managing diversity could create and foster positive diversity climate within the organization which in turn results into increased job satisfaction and productivity.’

From the trend of past researches, it is found that there is a positive and significant relationship between the three (diversity management, job satisfaction and productivity) and results obtained regarding the relationship were relatively consistent among related studies. However, the relationship between diversity and productivity is not sufficiently explored as the studies lacks organizational level analysis, tokenism, and artificially constructed research settings that cannot address a variety of cultural contexts and tightly dominated by US-centric researches (Jonsen et. al., 2011). Furthermore, most studies do not investigate underlying beliefs and values or managerial interventions. In addition, most of the studies focused on private firms and incredibly limited when it comes to the public sector.

#### **4.2 Future research direction**

It is also found that past researchers didn’t make serious and authentic attempts to address varieties of issues in diversity. Therefore, prospective researchers should focus on investigating the underlying beliefs and values on the issue of diversity, managerial interventions on the issue of diversity, organizational level analysis of the relationships between diversity, job satisfaction, and productivity, the role of developing effective diversity leaders on solving diversity related problems and finding out the impact of ‘social class’ as a diversity variable on employee performance, job satisfaction, and productivity.

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