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EXAMINING FACTORS AFFECTING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

ARSLAN AYUB
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
IQRA UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD

MUHAMMAD SALMAN ASLAM
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
IQRA UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD

ADEEL RAZZAQ
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
IQRA UNIVERSITY
ISLAMABAD

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to examine various organizational factors that influence diversity in the workplace. The factors incorporate organizational policies, management practices, and perceived inequity. The current paper is a conceptual paper solely based on literature review. The findings are reliable with consideration view of these organizational variables to be the factual obstacles in employing and heading workplace diversity issue on. The current study throws light on the significance of managing workplace diversity.

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KEYWORDS

Organizational Policies, Workplace Diversity, Management, Management Practices, Staffing

INTRODUCTION

The "business case for diversity" curtails from the development of the replica of diversity within the workplace since 1960's. The inventive model for diversity was positioned around affirmative action drawing strength from the law and a need to act in accordance with equal employment opportunity objectives. This observance based model conferred to the thought that tokenism was the reason; an individual was hired into a company when they differed from the dominant group. This primarily included race, ethnicity, and gender. The social justice model evolved next and extended the idea that individuals outside of the dominant group should be given opportunities within the workplace, not only because it was the law, but because it was the right thing to do. This model still revolved around the idea of tokenism, but it also brought in the notion of hiring based on a "good fit". From social justice developed the model of representation and diversity acceptance where the scope of diversity expanded beyond gender, race and ethnicity to include age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Today, the diversity model is one of inclusion, which reflects a globalized economy, and multicultural work force where value is placed on diversity of thought, and the perspectives shared from individual standpoints are seen to benefit organizations.

According to Church (1995); cited in Kenyon (2005), we define diversity in an organizational setting in terms of a collective of individuals who differ from each other on one or any number of dimensions including culture, values, education, gender, marital status and age. Diversity deals with visible and invisible characteristics. According to Parvis (2003); cited in Kenyon (2005), Dimensions of diversity include but are not limited to: age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, work experience, ethnicity, physical abilities/qualities, educational background, geographic locations, income, marital status, military experience, parental status and job classification. In the context of the workplace, valuing diversity means creating a workplace that respects and includes these differences, recognizing the unique contributions that individuals with many types of differences can make, and creating a work environment that maximizes the potential of all employees. Diversity is about having the long-term goal that the organization's workforce should generally reflect the population of the state it serves in all dimensions.

Despite the proliferation of research on discrimination, the value of diversity and multiculturalism in organizations, the literature fails to address the more serious dimensions of differences in organizations. In particular, we suggest that more attention must be paid to some common dilemmas of diversity, such as the backlash against any commitment to multiculturalism, the continuing anger and disappointment of women and minorities, and the systematic institutional resistance within organizations to difference (Prasad & Mills, 2007).

The study identifies to focus on diversity issues/problems and to understand the nature of organizational climate towards diversity. The following are the research questions:

RQ 1: What barriers exist or have been created that inhibit open access to opportunities for diversity within the organization?

RQ 2: The nature of the organizational climate toward diversity issues.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

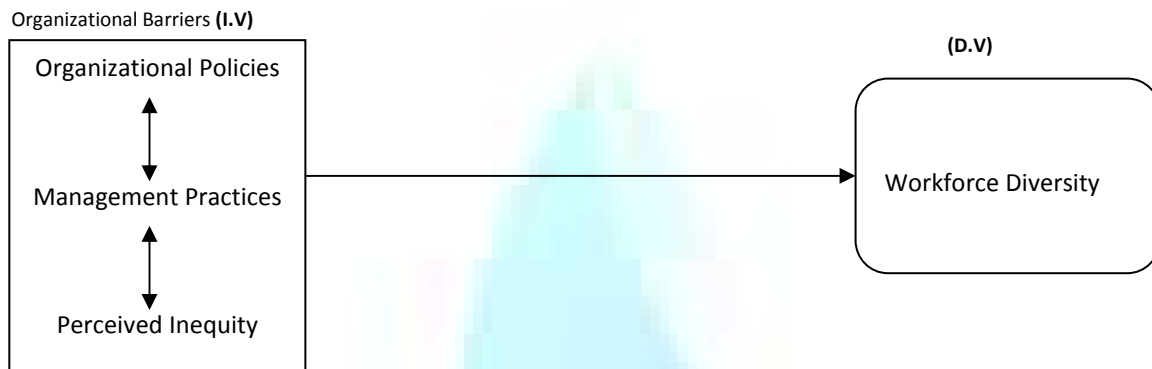
During the past decade, workplace diversity has become one of the most frequently discussed topics in management circles, while academic interest in the actual analysis of workplace diversity has remained limited (Prasad & Mills, 2007). Workplace diversity is characterized as representing two perspectives: functionalist perspectives and critical perspectives. The functionalist perspectives analyze workplace diversity from an organizational effectiveness framework. These approaches assume that positive and negative dimensions of workplace diversity can be identified, monitored, and controlled to benefit the organization. This functionalist approach is grounded in many of the same conceptual and research traditions found in organizational psychology, human-resource management, and systems theory. Conceptual and empirical analyses focus on topics such as organizational leadership, communication, work motivation, decision-making, group dynamics, organizational development/learning, and organizational culture (Argyris, 2006). The goal of work from a functionalist perspective, in both research and practice, is to identify how workplace diversity can enhance overall organizational productivity, responsiveness, and effectiveness (Cox, 2004).

By managing diversity, means planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized. The management of diversity has important ethical, legal, and economic ramifications for the

organization. According to Cox (2004) and Hultsman (2005), workforce diversification is not only the right thing to do, but it will ultimately enhance the economic performance and global competitiveness of the organization.

Issues of power and control ultimately have important ramifications for all members of the organizations but may have particularly dramatic impacts on marginalized groups within the organization (e.g., women, racial/ethnic minorities, gays/lesbians, individuals with disabilities, the elderly). Individuals in positions of power typically work, even at unconscious levels, to maintain their control, while those in subordinate positions and/or the powerless work to find equity in the system (Hultsman, 2005). This dynamism, then, leads to persistent clashes and efforts to resolve these tensions (Alvesson and Willmott, 2008). Thus, the analysis of workplace diversity, from a critical perspective, seeks deeper insights into the inner workings of organizations in order to lay bare the systemic inequities that exist at multiple levels of the organization. This uncovering of inequity, as it were, should ultimately foster the meaningful reorganization of such programs and provide opportunities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2008) for both workers and constituents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Organizational Policies: The manifestation of organizational policies and practices towards diversity.

An organization's commitment to diversity is reflected in the extent to which diversity policies and procedures are mutually understood and communicated (Cox, 2004). Nevertheless, diversity issues including short and long term agency concerns are rarely discussed in any consistent fashion (Allison, 2009). Diversity policies should be in aligned with organizational mission and vision. Numerous organizations have recognized and attempted to respond effectively to the demographic shifts in the workforce by launching diversity initiatives, hiring diversity consultants, and offering an array of diversity training programs (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).

H1. Organizational Policies and Practices have a great influence on workforce diversity.

Management Practices: Management practices that inhibit responsiveness to diversity issues.

Managing diversity means acknowledging people's differences and recognizing these differences as valuable; it enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Good management alone will not necessarily help you work effectively with a diverse workforce. It is often difficult to see what part diversity plays in a specific area of management. Diversity initiatives depend on the working philosophy of individual staff. However, there is lack of information to staff from the leadership. This creates a gap between whom we think we are serving, whom we would like to serve, and who will really serve.

H2. Management practices influence diversity in the workforce.

Perceived Inequity: Selective hiring and promotion.

Despite more inclusive hiring and promotion patterns at many levels of organizations, there are limited opportunities for women and minorities. Argyris (2003) has observed that it is not unusual for managers to want to clone themselves; to hire people who are like them in style and substance. This organizational cloning makes not only increased comfort levels with coworkers but also allows one to foster continuity in the agency consistent with the current management culture. Such behavior is detrimental to diversity goals and limits the ability of the organization to become increasingly inclusive (Allison, 2009). Selecting or hiring employees based on the rule "he is color of me" become the basis for the loss of a huge talent pool from organization.

H3. Perceived inequity in hiring, promotion and placement inhibits diversity to workplace.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUDING REMARKS

Management needs to be constantly listening for diversity, and looking for the subtle cues that are going to come up, but it's the subtle ones that kind of slip through unless somebody's paying attention to it. The goal of this research was to identify the nature of the organizational climate toward diversity issues. The studies reflected deep complexity of workplace diversity. Policy statements exist, diversity-training workshops are held, hiring and promotion patterns have begun to change, but most of these factors failed to demonstrate substantive commitments to diversity. At many levels, an on-going inconsistency existed between what agencies said about diversity in policy and training and what they actually did about it. The superficial treatments of diversity allowed organizations to believe that they are promoting diversity but in fact they ignored serious issues that affected the morale, effectiveness and productivity of the agency.

To address the diversity issues, most people believe in the golden rule: treat others as you want to be treated. The implicit assumption is that how you want to be treated is how others want to be treated. However, there was a lack of information from managers to their subordinates. A heterogeneous population led to varying level of discomforts among the people working. Thus, the management's practices not fully utilized the benefits of diverse workforce.

Perceived equity was another barrier to diversity in the workplace. The informal "rules of conduct" which surrounded hiring and promotion practices were ultimately linked to the power relations within the organization, and were unspoken and prevalent at all levels of the organization. These rules became so institutionalized that it was difficult for those socialized into the organization to see how their own behavior, policies, and procedures continue to promote inequity, insensitivity, and/or lack of access.

Managing diversity well provides a distinct advantage in an era when flexibility and creativity are keys to competitiveness. An organization needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet new customer needs. Heterogeneity promotes creativity and heterogeneous groups have been shown to produce better solutions to problems and a higher level of critical analysis. This can be a vital asset at a time when the campus is undergoing tremendous change and self-examination to find new and more effective ways to operate.

To address diversity issues, consider these questions: what policies, practices, and ways of thinking and within our organizational culture have differential impact on different groups? What organizational changes should be made to meet the needs of a diverse workforce as well as to maximize the potential of all workers? It depends on the individual. We may share similar values, such as respect or need for recognition, but how we show those values through behavior may be different for different groups or individuals. How do we know what different groups or individuals need?

Perhaps instead of using the golden rule, we could use the platinum rule which states: "treat others as they want to be treated." Moving our frame of reference from what may be our default view ("our way is the best way") to a diversity-sensitive perspective ("let's take the best of a variety of ways") will help us to

manage more effectively in a diverse work environment. With effective management of diversity, the campus develops a reputation as an employer of choice. Not only will managers have the ability to attract the best talent from a shrinking labor pool, they can save time and money in recruitment and turnover costs.

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