

**WORKFORCE DIVERSITY : A STRENGTH OR A CONFLICT?****Voice of Research**

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**Abstract**

*As the economy becomes increasingly global, our workforce becomes increasingly diverse. Organizational success and competitiveness will depend on the ability to manage diversity in the workplace effectively. This study is devoted to the cause of workplace diversity and tries to seek out the initiatives taken by the Organizations these days to encounter the challenging issue of workplace diversity. No doubt we are going global but the question is that are we able to considerably keep ourselves abreast with the dynamism required to reap the benefits of globalization. The data collected for the purpose of the study is with the help of structured questionnaire. The statistical tool Z-test has been used to find out the statistical inferences and finally conclude the study undertaken.*

As human resource is attracting lot of attention of these days Organisations, Workforce diversity is also becoming a primary concern and also an area where our managers need to be more focused. India's workforce is inherently a land of diverse culture and multi racial community. Changing demographic profiles, presence of more women at workplace, globalization, changing work priorities have increased the diversity of our workforce. Employees from various culture, different generations, nationalities, different linguistic patterns and belonging from various cultural background often work together in the same organizations chasing similar goals for them as well as their employers. It is therefore important for the organizations to design such policies and practices to build such an environment which can support and cultivate a harmonious workplace. Workforce diversity is a tool which can enhance the organizational effectiveness. It is argued that organizations that value diversity will definitely cultivate success and have a future in his dynamic global labour market (Jain and Verma, 1996). Diversity is a common issue in the workforce environment, in same companies employees often get discriminated or misunderstood because of diverse features (Sacco, Joshua, Schmitt, Neal, 2005). Workforce diversity addresses many issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, sex discrimination etc. Such issues if not resolved properly can mount up to serious workforce agitations. Workforce diversity management has become an important issue for both government and Private organization. Its importance has mainly been brought by free movement of workforce due to globalization and the fight for human rights by certain minority groups who feel excluded from the employment sector.

**Rationale behind the study :** An organization's success and survival depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize its benefits. When the organizations actively access their handling of workplace diversity issues,

develop and implement diversity plans, multiple benefits can be achieved. But we witness that the organizations do encounter certain challenges in managing diversity issues like perceptual, cultural and language barriers; resistance to change and problems in implementation of diversity in workplace policies. Presence of both the genders has made this issue even more interesting and challenging. This particular study has been undertaken to find out the factors in diversity and related issues amongst both the genders.

**Objectives**

The study aims to find out the impact of workforce diversity on workplace environment.

The study further aims to notify and assess the impact of diversity amongst male and female employees.

The study further seeks to find out the challenges faced by the employees in encountering diversity.

**Hypothesis**

The factors that give rise to workplace diversity issues equally affect male and female employees.

The strategies employed by the organization to face diversity issues equally favors male and female employees.

**Literature Review :** Workplace diversity refers to variety of differences between people working in the organization. All of us have different individualities because we all are born differently at different times, under different circumstances, by different parents; as a result we have different grooming, experiences, genetic inheritance. It is same for those days' organizations also. Employees in any organization vary in all aspects of their being (Prof. Maicibin Alhas)

Diversity relates to the fact that we are all unique individuals. Thompson (2002:76), notified that each individual is a member of variety of social groups, like gender and religion, and these have a significant bearing on people's experiences. Differences in people such as



employees can be seen in the way people think, the way they act and the energy they put into their work.

Let us consider the following examples which highlights the issues such diversity especially in Indian context- (2010 Corporate Responsibility Report).

As employees in India represent different cultures and backgrounds, they communicate in slightly different ways. Increase in female working population has also led to shape new policies to manage the workforce diversity.

The concept of diversity management gained attention with globalization and the need for more organizations to spread globally to reach customers across the world. The broader definition of diversity may include age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearances and economic status (Wentling and Palma Rivas, 2000). Diversity also addresses to the co-existence of the employees from various socio-cultural backgrounds within the company. The cultural factors such as race, gender, age, colour, ethnicity form a part and parcel of cultural diversity challenges.

Managing diversity means enabling the diverse workforce to perform its full potential in an equitable work environment where no one group has an advantage or disadvantage (Torres and Bruxelles, 1992)

**Benefits of Managing Workforce diversity :** Managing diversity can create a competitive advantage. Potential benefits of this diversity include better decision making, higher creativity and innovation, greater success in marketing to foreign and domestic ethnic minority communities, and a better distribution of economic opportunity (Cox, 1991; Cox and Blake, 1991)

**How to manage a diverse Workforce in Organization :** Companies can succeed at diversity if the initiative to create, manage and values the diverse workforce has the full support of the top management (Hayes, 1999; Jackson et al;1992).

**Signs of Diversity at the Workplace :** Employees sentiments should be taken care of. They should feel that they are a part of workplace; Efficiency in managing younger and older generations employee sentiments. When polar opposites, can come together and work towards the company's goals and missions, then we say that the business is diverse by nature; In addition to monetary profits, if owners and managers can build cultural capital, then it can potentially pay off in future; Organizations need to create an infrastructure that fosters the viruses of diversity. It includes promoting employees to lead teams, making them a part of management hierarchy.

**Research Methodology :** The research is based on primary data which was collected from 50 respondents by the way of questionnaire and personal interaction with 10

respondents. Respondents who were contacted to fill the questionnaire were all working in different organizations on different job profiles. Amongst the 50 respondents, 25 were male and 25 were female respondents. Convenient Random sampling was used to collect the data and generate the responses. The respondents who were requested to fill the questionnaire belonged to the state of Chhattisgarh. The questionnaire was made in two sections; the first section was designed to know about the Organization in which the respondents were working. The practices followed by the organization to manage workforce diversity (mostly focused on diversity issues related to male and female employees working together). The opportunities provided by the Organizations to balance the challenges of diverse employees (Male & female working population) were also mainly focused to be explored in the questionnaire. The second section of the questionnaire was focused to know the employee's point of views regarding workforce diversity and its impact on their working environment. The statistical tools such as Density Analysis and Z- Test were used to draw the inferences related to the Study in question. Density Analysis has been used to summarize the responses generated from male and female respondents. And to know whether the factors that give rise to diversity issues equally affect male and female working population, Z-Test was employed. Further, Z- Test was again made use to find out the proportional association of both these genders with respect to the Organizational policies and strategies addressed to face the issues of Diversity.

**Table 1: Profile of the Respondents**

a.

| Male Respondents | Female Respondents | Total Respondents |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 25               | 25                 | 50                |

**b. Size of the Organization in terms of no. of employees:**

| Employees  | Total responses |
|------------|-----------------|
| 1 to 20    | 18              |
| 21 to 50   | Nil             |
| 51-100     | 10              |
| 101-200    | 8               |
| 201 to 500 | 11              |
| 500 +      | 3               |

**c. Most of the Respondents were working in:**

| Principle Activity           | M   | F   |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Energy & Water Supply        | 2   | Nil |
| Assembling & Trading         | 6   | Nil |
| Construction                 | 2   | Nil |
| Consultancy Services         | 4   | 6   |
| Health                       | Nil | 3   |
| Education                    | 8   | 11  |
| Transport                    | 1   | Nil |
| Communication                | Nil | 2   |
| Banking & Related Activities | 2   | 2   |
| Public Administration        | Nil | 1   |

Findings : The Respondents were asked following questions on the Organizational efforts made towards tackling the workforce diversity issues as such – Has your Organization ever : Installed specialist facilities for diverse



groups; daped existing policies (e.g. time off) to meet the needs of diversity/ diverse groups; Allowed more flexibility in working hours; Allowed more flexibility in jobs, tasks & duties; Examined your salary arrangements for potential discrimination; Made sure that you have overstated your job requirements and Changed a job description to suit an applicant with special requirements After applying Z- test to verify whether the Male and Female respondents equally favor that their organizations do have policies for managing diverse employees:

| Options | Z Value | Interpretation  |
|---------|---------|---|
| A       | 1.00003 | Male & Female employees equally are in favor of the specialist facilities provided by their employers for the diverse employees   |
| B       | 1.89741 | The policies designed by the organizations to meet the diversity issues equally satisfy both the Genders.   |
| C       | 0.01    | Both the groups of employees that they were not provided any flexibility in working hours by their employers.   |
| D       | -1      | Male employees agreed to some extent that they were allowed some flexibility in jobs, tasks related to their jobs and duties whereas Female respondents did not acknowledge any such flexibility.               |
| E       | -0.5345 | The opinion of both the group of employees also differed on the question of examination of salary examination by the employers to avoid any potential discrimination  |
| F       | -0.3923 | There was also witnessed difference on the issue of job requirements.   |
| G       | -0.8945 | Female respondents acknowledged their employers more than male respondents when they were asked whether they have witnessed any change in job description so as to suit with an individual special requirement. |

Female Respondents were not satisfied with the ratio of the male and female employees employed at their workplace.

Both the male and female respondents seem to agree with the fact that diverse employees better identify with the needs of today’s customers.

Both the genders do agree that if employment opportunities are provided to them, it can enhance the Organizational image and such organizations have a better public image.

Both the group of employees agreed that if diverse employees are employed in equal proportions then it enhances innovativeness and also brings in fresh ideas which in turn improve organizational effectiveness.

This was also marked by the both sets of respondents that diverse teams make team-working a richer experience.

**Conclusion :** Organizations cannot survive without acknowledging workforce diversity. It not only provides benefits to the Employees but also improves the abilities of the Organizations in totality. Diverse employees bring in fresh ideas, new talent and many other things which benefit these organizations. An employee considers his/ her workplace to be a second home. This second home should provide him a congenial environment to grow and prosper. The workplace should be free from the

malpractices like discrimination, differential on the basis of sex of the employee, harassment etc. “Together we grow and prosper”, should be the main agenda of these day’s organizations. In today’s fast paced work environment a successful organization is one where diversity is a norm and not an exception (Lawrence, 2001). A cultural environment must allow differences to be celebrated instead of merely tolerated. In order to effectively manage diversity, and recognize it as source of strength and not a conflict, one would need to be educated and programmed to accept and embrace diversity. These days’ organizations have accepted diversity but still need to take it more seriously and meaningfully.

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