

An approach to contemporary management and leadership practice in workplace diversity

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Abstract

This paper analyses the contribution of modern management and leadership to achieving excellent diversity practice at work. It considers the classical management concepts like planning, organising, leading, controlling and motivation to support the practice of diversity effectively. Based from the author's experience and research, it is found out that diversity at work is a claimed statement while it is not practised according to the sound management principles. To better address diversity at work, managers are expected to incorporate diversity through all their practices and see how the concept is successfully incorporated at work. This research is non-exhaustive as management practices do differ from one organisation to the next, yet its importance must not be understated. Leadership and motivational theory along with contemporary management practice also plays a key role in achieving diversity in today's organisation and this is also aligned with sound practice of diversity.

Keywords: diversity, management, leadership, practice of diversity

1. Introduction

A reasonable question regarding diversity at work is who is the person managing or overseeing diversity? This is essential because it is the company manager who will have to work with people of diverse backgrounds in a more sophisticated and complex environment than ever before. Based from earlier views of diversity, today's workplace has to accept that diversity is something visible, common almost everywhere and that requires capable managers of addressing diversity issues. Some might immediately call for a diversity manager who can be a workplace sociologist or psychologist. Whether it is something dealing with organisational behaviour issues, the role and importance of a manager is always felt.

Effective managers are people who are advocates of diversity. They should not be individuals who just see one side of the coin, develop prejudice and stereotypes of the different people around them and make complacent remarks. Rather than being ethno-centred, managers need to have balanced opinions of people, keep as far as possible their neutrality at work, and make enforcements upon those who curb diversity. It is a known fact that diversity managers are apt in solving challenging workplace issues while they come out enriched with experience while working with a culturally diverse environment.

1.1 The Practice of Classical Management

Management is the practice of dealing with people and seeing that work is done through people. In workplace diversity, managers are expected to carry out their basic functions of planning, organising, leading and controlling while ensuring that these key functions are aligned with diversity. There will be issues like change where diversity can manifest itself say, an organisation that opens up to an international workforce, a multinational operating in different geographical locations, etc. These are conditions where the manager has to demonstrate how effectively he can use concepts of diversity and ensure that employees fit in effectively within the organisational culture.

Next comes leadership. Though leading is a function of management, leadership in diversity is another essential component. Leading means to provide guidance and support employees and through a diverse workplace environment, all workers must comply by the leadership of their managers. Alongside, there is the motivational factor which is important to keep the spirits of the employees alive. These evidently depend upon the abilities of leaders to motivate their subordinates and see how well they get inspired with the vision of their leaders.

There are certainly several cases of leaders who bring about high levels of motivation and performance from their teams but the difficulty might arise when teams comprise people coming from different backgrounds with their particular differences. This could be in itself a challenge to diversity but clearly, excellent managers are also excellent leaders and they show their prowess in managing diversity. Leaders have to display the right attitude, the desire to lead, the need to be intellectually capable and equally the ability to inspire their fellow colleagues to embrace diversity while moving on the right path.

This article addresses the management and leadership issue with case illustrations and explanations of them in different contexts. Effort is taken not to deeply go through management or motivational theory but rather a selection of theories and practices in both areas to address the diversity issue. The student will have a general idea of how to integrate management issues with that of diversity.

2. Planning For Diversity

Planning for diversity is a first managerial function that needs to be addressed in the organisation. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (2004) in its Comprehensive diversity management plan explains that an affirmative employment plan includes four Guiding Principles that embody the principles of diversity management^[1]. They include:

Creating a working environment that is free of discrimination, including harassment, and is accessible to individuals with disabilities;

Ensuring that agency policies, processes, and procedures provide all employees the opportunity to participate in mission accomplishments, and to compete fairly and equitably for career enhancement and advancement;

Employing a competent and highly skilled workforce, consistent with the national labour market, and enabling employees to accomplish the agency’s mission by providing support, tools, and a positive environment; and

Recognising, appreciating and valuing diversity, thereby establishing trust, respect, and concern for the welfare of all employees within the agency. From this point of view, it is clearly seen how planning must be aligned with diversity, in particular, recruitment and development of work environment.

3. Organising For Diversity

Kelchner (2015) views the organisational function of managers in diversity through cross-functional teams include members from different areas of the business, which creates a group of members with diverse educational backgrounds, skill sets and talents. The diversity of the group allows the group to share ideas and skills to reach the objective of the team. For example, if the team is developing a system to reduce defects, team members with engineering skills and knowledge can

develop new tools and equipment to reduce defects while members from production can provide input on the efficiency of the new tooling or equipment.

The diversity of a cross-functional team gives it an advantage when evaluating a problem from all angles, but it can also create conflict among the group. Team members may have difficulty understanding the viewpoint of other members of the group [2]. For example, if team members with an engineering background create a tool or new method for production and the production team members provide negative feedback, it may create conflict.

Consequently, all major organisational change involves a cultural change, and a diversity effort is cultural change at its core. According to Lapid-Bogda (1998) it requires an organisation to search its collective soul and focus on essential aspects of its culture: seminal values; organisational demands for conformity in thought, interpersonal style, and action; power structure and power dynamics; employee participation; and inclusion/exclusion issues, to name a few [3].

4. Control Function in Managing Diversity

Control is best described as the process of measuring performance, comparing it with the standards of acceptable performance and taking corrective action in case of deviation. Below is provided a chart to explain the issue of control in diversity based on the author’s personal source.

Area of control in diversity management	Standards of performance	Control mechanism
Recruitment	Recruiting from the community, accepting minorities and the disabled as key element of the firm’s recruitment charter.	Ensure that the different communities in social diversity are represented at work wherever applicable.
Promotion and reward	Check that reward structures impact on workplace diversity. See that promotion is made on merit and exceptions.	Take corrective action if minorities are not included in company’s promotion and reward schemes. Adopt an all-inclusive tactic of workplace diversity.
Communication	Ensure that the right attitudes, tones and style are used in communicating to all employees in the firm.	Check for vocabulary and bring corrections wherever applicable. For example, the male gender is used but addresses all types of employees.
Employee attitudes	Have a charter of ethics and good governance regarding employee behaviour at work. Create a discrimination-free workplace or maintain ‘kick racism away’ campaign.	See that the codes of conduct are strictly respected and employees do not make hurtful comments on others. Enforce disciplinary action in case of direct discrimination and unpleasant remarks.

Fig 1: Control in diversity (Author’s source)

Nelson (2015) provides some more information on evaluating the effectiveness in diversity. He supports the need to consistently evaluate the diversity and motivational initiatives performed at your company. This can be done with a variety of methods. For example, a diversity manager can analyse the degrees of diversity within specific departments matched with the overall moods and rates of efficiency within those departments. It also can be helpful to distribute diversity surveys to the employees. This is an excellent way to learn how valued various groups feel within your company. By regularly evaluating the diversity initiatives in the workplace, a manager can ensure that its staff is competitive and valued on a personal level [4]. This section explained how control as a managerial function applied to critical areas like recruitment, promotion, reward management including communication within diversity.

5. Leadership and Diversity Management

Theories of leadership have neglected diversity issues. Chin (2010) comments that as the population within the United States and in countries throughout the world becomes increasingly diverse, the contexts in which leadership occurs within institutions and communities will also become increasingly diverse. Attention to diversity is not simply about representation of leaders from diverse groups in the ranks of leadership. Attention to diversity means paradigm shifts in our theories of leadership so as to make them inclusive; it means incorporating explanations of how dimensions of diversity shape our understanding of leadership. It means paying attention to the perceptions and expectations of diverse leaders by diverse followers and to how bias influences the exercise of leadership. Although leadership theories have evolved and reflect changing social contexts, they remain silent on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice. Theories of leadership need to be expanded to incorporate diversity if they are to be

relevant for the 21st century amidst new social contexts, emerging global concerns, and changing population demographics ^[5].

Michaels (2015) stresses that a company's leadership defines the culture of an organisation. Senior leadership is responsible for ensuring that communication and company culture trickle downward to middle management and individual contributors in the company. Whether the concept is employee engagement, diversity management or anything else, senior leadership needs to actively pursue it, and believe in it, for it to succeed in the organisation ^[6]. Senior-level managers have the most reach and power within an organisation, and their ideals travel downward throughout the organisation. In the case of diversity management, leadership in diversity makes sense. Today's leaders are highly encouraged to adopt the right standing in diversity.

5.1 The Transformational Leadership Style

In assessing the leadership styles of managers in diversity, the two latest but common styles of leadership are addressed here. Transformational leadership is often identified as the single most effective style. The style was first described in the late 1970s and later expanded upon by researcher Bernard M. Bass. Some of the key characteristics of his style of leadership are the abilities to motivate and inspire followers and to direct positive changes in groups. Cherry (2015) states that transformational leaders tend to be emotionally intelligent, energetic, and passionate. They are not only committed to helping the group achieve its goals, but also to helping group members fulfil their potential. Research has revealed that this style of leadership is linked to higher performance and improved group satisfaction than other leadership styles ^[7]. A study also found that transformational leadership was linked to improved well-being among group members.

Application to workplace diversity

This style applies better to organisations that are flexible and open to change. Companies that operate in competitive environments are likely to have transformational leaders. In diversity, transformational leaders must pay respect to the culture of their employees and try to bring and mould them in their business so that they will better respond to change or evolution. The valuing of differences and the effort of converging the differences will be an added value to diversity management.

5.2 The Transactional Leadership Style

The other style is transactional leadership which views the leader-follower relationship as a transaction. By accepting a position as a member of the group, the individual has agreed to obey the leader. In most situations, this involves the employer-employee relationship and the transaction focuses on the follower completing required tasks in exchange for monetary compensation.

One of the key benefits of transactional leadership is that it creates clearly defined roles. People know what they are required to do and what they will be receiving in exchange for completing these tasks ^[8]. It also allows leaders to offer a great deal of supervision and direction if it is needed. Group members may also be motivated to perform well in order to receive rewards. One of the biggest downsides is that the

transactional style tends to stifle creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.

Application to workplace diversity

This style might be more applicable to diversity in established organisations-local or foreign-where there is a culture of productivity and reward. Transactional leaders are more likely to succeed when their employees coming from a diverse environment might not communicate too well but can follow the directives. Foreign employees might be initially more open to this situation but eventually, as their business flourishes, transactional leadership might no more apply.

6. Motivation in Diversity

In line with leadership, motivation is another key aspect to discuss in this article. It starts from an unfulfilled need to searching behaviour, creating desire, taking the appropriate action to fulfil the need and be ultimately capable of overcoming frustration. This might apply to workplace diversity by encouraging all forms of the diverse workforce to feel motivated. This is basically a satisfaction-dissatisfaction issue if compared with Herzberg's classical two-factor motivation-hygiene theory. Employees might initially cater to the workplace basics namely the hygiene factors and ultimately move to the intrinsic ones. Regardless of need orientation type, teachers, for instance, seem to prefer integrative leadership styles characterised by both systems orientation and person orientation ^[9].

Diversity managers are expected to create motivation among their staff. This is particularly achievable if all employees embrace diversity and feel part of the team. It is also up to the diversity manager to create conditions whereby the employee feels at home while working (Mc Gregor's Theory Y). The concept of rewards needs to apply correctly and ethically when one deals with motivation in diversity.

Morgan (2015) claims that many people think diversity in the workplace refers mainly to gender and race, but diversity also refers to differences in age, culture, religion, sexual orientation and physical ability ^[10]. The contemporary perspective on workplace diversity also recognises individual differences in temperament and other personal qualities. All this creates quite the challenge for managers who must motivate their staff.

7. Conclusion

This article briefly explained the managerial approach to diversity based from the key management functions of planning, organising, controlling and leading. Diversity managers must understand how to set objectives and goals for their employees where their plans must correctly anticipate problems that might be affected by the non-inclusion of the diverse workforce. Organising for diversity mainly concerns managing change and organisational development. Another aspect dealt with leadership through a comparison of transactional and transformational leaders. The leadership styles will differ according to contexts though transformational leadership might claim better value in diversity management. By empowering workers to perform better within a structure that praises diversity is something of paramount importance to a firm's success. Finally, the concept of motivation in diversity was briefly addressed. Motivation aims at bringing satisfaction both through intrinsic and

extrinsic rewards. It is an imperative for the diversity manager to consider the importance of employee motivation in diversity management. The approach hence sums up the diversity issue while stressing that traditional management practice developed by influential theorists like Handy, Fayol, Herzberg, etc. should now also incorporate diversity while this was a taken for granted assumption in ethnocentric organisations in the past but should be duly considered in today's evolving environment where diversity is a visible and corporate concern.

8. References

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