

Role of Employee Diversity with Homogenous Organisations Cultures- With reference to the Study on Dabbawalla Organisation.

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Abstract

Diversity management is a strategic process to manage a diverse workforce-including the fight against stereotypes, prejudice and all kind of discrimination due to the individual perceptions and assumptions. The integration and learning perspective recognizes that the skills and experiences acquired based on membership in a cultural identity group are valuable assets that can positively impact the way the group conceptualizes and addresses problems and defines its markets.

It has also been identified as a key factor that influences the homogeneous team performance are the cultural factors in the individual attributes of team members like the skill, knowledge, ability and how these contributions can potentially combine to dictate overall performance outcomes for the team. The fashion in which a team is configured has a strong influence on team processes and the outcomes that the team achieves. The Dabbawallas is one such Indian Organisation which proves the perfection in business performance with a culture of homogeneous teams.

Key words: Diversity, homogeneous, culture, teams, performance.

Introduction:

Working effectively with different cultures is a necessary skill for anyone in a culturally diverse work environment. Managing diversity is one of the most important challenges faced by managers and their organizations. In today's work environment, co-workers are likely to be of different gender, age, religion, cultural background, race and ethnicity. They also differ in terms of lifestyle, choices available, perspectives, attitudes, value system, beliefs, behaviors, expectations, skills and experiences. These issues are not just about discriminatory practices but they modify the nature and demands placed on leadership and management and bring into prominence the concept of diversity.

How well or how prepared managers are able to invest in the concept of diversity will impact not just on work issues but also on sensitivity to customer's needs, legal compliance, business' ethical issues, profitability and even social cohesion. Diversity management is a strategic process to manage a diverse workforce-including the fight against stereotypes, prejudice and all kind of discrimination due to the individual perceptions and assumptions- in the manner to maximize the benefit and minimize barriers of different opinions, behavior and attitudes of human beings within a company. The integration and learning perspective recognizes that the skills and experiences acquired based on membership in a cultural identity group are valuable assets that can positively impact the way the group conceptualizes and addresses problems and defines its markets

Culture is like an iceberg. Its visible part is the objective part, which comprises of eye contact, greetings, clothing, food, initiative, volume, and time consciousness. But the bigger part which is hidden under the sea that is the subjective part which comprises of values, feelings, assumptions, authority roles, concept of truth, motivations, etc is the one which needs to be understood in international business because that determines how an organization has to operate.

Anthropologists and sociologists define culture as "Ways of Living ", built up by a group of human beings, which are transmitted from one generation to another. A culture acts out its ways of living in the context of social institutions, including family, educational, religious, governmental, and business institutions. Culture includes both conscious and unconscious values, ideas, attitudes, and symbols that shape human behavior and that are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Team composition in work organisations is usually either homogeneous, in which all members are the same, or heterogeneous, in which team members all contain significant differences. It has also been identified as a key factor that influences team performance. It factors in the individual attributes of team members (e.g. skill, experience, and ability) and how these contributions can potentially combine to dictate overall performance outcomes for the team. In the past decade, research on team effectiveness has burgeoned as teams have become increasingly common in organizations of all kinds. The fashion in which a team is configured has a strong influence on team processes and the outcomes that the team achieves. The main outcomes associated with team performance can be classified mostly as performance outcomes (overall quality/precision of

work produced, etc.) internal member outcomes (group cohesion, etc.) and behavioral outcomes (absenteeism, etc).

Literature Review:

Lazear (1998a, 1998b) asserts that a diverse team can generate productivity gains if three factors are present. First, team members must have different skills, ability, or information. In this way the team may gain from the complementarities among its members. Second, the different skills, ability, or information of team members must be relevant to one another. Obviously, little complementarity occurs if the skills of one team member are not relevant to the production of a teammate. Third, communication is necessary for team members to perform the relevant joint tasks and engage in knowledge transfer to enhance productivity. Increases in communication costs reduce the gains

achievable from skill diversity. These factors suggest that at least two aspects of diversity should be considered when analyzing teams: (1) diversity in the skills, ability, and information sets of team members; and (2) diversity in other factors that may enhance or inhibit within-team communication. Christine Sleeter reminds us that, "A major problem with most staff development programs for multicultural education is that the unit of change on which they focus is the individual rather than the an organization." Such change must be paralleled by a change in the culture and structure of the organization, the vertical dimension, since it is here where the root problems at the horizontal level often reside.

Cultural adoption. A first simple model capturing the incentives for cultural integration in organisations is provided by Lazear (1999)'s analysis of adoption of a common language. In this framework, individuals from two different cultural groups (a minority and a majority) are matched to interact economically and socially. Cultural integration facilitates trade across individuals. The incentives for an individual belonging to the minority cultural group to assimilate and adopt the culture of the majority are then directly related to the expected gains from trade that such a strategy provides.

Objective of Study:

- To study the role of diverse teams with homogenous organisation culture.

Research Methodology:

The study is based on secondary literature findings on diversity management and a case study of Indian Organisations of “Dabbawalla”.

Findings:

Productive teams should be diverse along the skills, ability, and information dimensions, but homogeneous in other dimensions, such as demographics, culture so that reduces communication costs or what he calls “costs of cross-cultural dealing.”

1. Team management- organizations today have to constitute multicultural teams having members who bring different competencies into organizational decision- making process. However, they have to be facilitated to communicate while engaged in decision-making exercises in ways that are acceptable to team members.
2. Leadership- in a multicultural organization transformational leader (Tichy and Devanna, 1997) would be most appropriate. He or she enables ordinary individual belonging to different cultures to do extraordinary things.
3. Organizational Structure- in intercultural management, a learning structure is well suited. Such a structure enables the organization to pursue a global strategy while simultaneously customizing strategies based on the cultural requirements.
4. Core values- the two aspects pertaining to the core values of a transnational corporation. First concerns the process of selection of core values and second relates to how these values are disseminated. These values should include respect for all human beings, and a basic people orientation. The overall philosophy should be one of liberalization and a belief that there is always something to be learnt from association with other people.
5. Communications- this requires sensitivity to language differences. Bringing diverse managers together to participate in cross-cultural sensitivity programmes can enhance appreciation of different communication patterns.
6. Conflict resolution- companies have to take into account that conflicts could arise simply because so much diversity exists. Conflict resolution in an

intercultural context would require skill in being able to describe conflicts in unambiguous terms.

Case Study:

Dabbawallah; is a person in India, most commonly in Mumbai, who is part of a delivery system that collects hot food in lunch boxes from the residences of workers in the late morning, delivers the lunches to the workplace, predominantly using bicycles and the railway trains, and returns the empty boxes to the worker's residence that afternoon. They are also used by meal suppliers in Mumbai, where they ferry ready, cooked meals from central kitchens to the customers and back.

The question is: how does this organisation get extraordinary performance from average or even less-than-average people? It's a big question since most managers don't have the luxury of hiring stars — they have to work with what they have. The answer to the question, alas, is not simple, at least not simple enough to be compressed into one line. Thomke models the dabbawala system as working on the pillars of organisation, management, process and culture and sees them as mutually reinforcing.

The 5,000 dabbawalas of Mumbai are organised into a flat structure of 200 self-managed teams of 25 individuals each, who vary in age from 18 to 65, with the most experienced ones acting as supervisors in addition to doing their own deliveries. Each dabbawala is an entrepreneur in his own right, responsible for negotiating prices with his own customers.

The most important pillar of the dabbawala system is its old fashioned culture of community — something most new-age corporates don't focus enough on. The men, and few women, who make up the dabbawala network trace their lineage to a clutch of villages around Pune and they share the same language, values, work ethic and religious beliefs. They are highly motivated because they believe that delivering food to office goers is like a service to God, not unlike delivering medicine to the sick.

"It's much more powerful mission statement than something like 'always delight the customer' or 'spread excellence'.

New workers are typically friends or relatives of existing members, and though Mumbai is a melting pot of religions, ethnicities, and dialects, most dabbawalas have the same culture, language, values, work ethic, diet, and religious beliefs.

Many come from the region around the city of Pune and can trace their roots back to warriors who fought in the 17th century for Chhatrapati Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire in western India.

The organizational culture at the Dabbawalas in Mumbai gives a picture of how a traditionally run business works in India. The organizational structure is flat at appearance but there exists certain level of hierarchy among the contractor, the manager of the Dabbawala and the Dabbawala. Each Dabbawala has one manager who manages the orders or Dabbas that each Dabbawala has to deliver and assigns him work based on the localities from where the Dabbas are to be collected. The Dabbawala are recruited and put under a 2 day training program aimed at giving them the basic know how of what is expected of him during his work hours. This reflects the collectivist attitude prevalent in Indian organizational culture, where a particular group working for the same goal is considered as a family that is working to nurture a common goal of productivity and profit.

The Dabbawalas have two association the Mandal Committee and the Trust Committee. The members of the Mandal Committee are 11 elected contractors. Its primary responsibilities are to deal with conflicts between the Dabbawalas and their contractors. The Trust Committee, also comprises 11 elected contractors, it is responsible for proper functioning of community inns in Pune. This reflects the intent of giving back to the society from where these Dabbawalas originated and a strong feeling of linkage with their roots even though work takes priority to them. The Indian organizations like the Dabbawalas of Mumbai can achieve excellence if they bring about a judicious mix of conserving, homogeneous, mechanistic, indigenous and competitive culture in their organizational culture.

Conclusion:

1. Commitment by employees- all perspectives on intercultural management are united in their opinion that organizational culture should support the accommodation of diversity, but ultimately, implementing and supporting the norms of intercultural management is the responsibility of all employees.
2. Management styles of working- the styles of working used by employees need to be compatible with the implementation of cultural management. Generally speaking, even the style of working should be modified as per the culture of the country. The onus should be to make people feel at ease providing inputs regardless of their position in the hierarchy or cultural background.

3. Nationalism- can strong national identities inhibit the application of the global convergence perspective? Hence, intercultural management should embrace cultural relativism, or a belief that there can be more than one way of getting things done.

The accelerated pace by which intercultural management is being practiced worldwide has been greatly facilitated by turn of the century modes of communication. The advancements in telecommunication, transportation are facilitating managers to find commonalities, express their differences and work through them.

The purpose of valuing individual diversity and appreciating differences is not simply to make people feel good about each other. Businesses, like other social institutions, have a specific purpose for existing, to implement their mission through whatever product or service they provide. Thus, bringing interactional change at the individual level is only half the process.

This second dimension, focused on the institution like the Dabbawallas is the vertical dimension concerned with harnessing and empowering homogeneity, the area that deals not only with corporate culture and structure, the way tasks are divided to accomplish the mission of the organisation, but also with thinking systems. This dimension holds the key to effecting the greatest efficiency like the achievement of Six Sigma by the Dabbawalla Organisation, for it is here where exclusion finds it most comfortable home. But change must be more than merely cosmetic, for a diverse looking customers to the business. It must also examine in what ways the vision, values, mission and structure of the corporation contribute or undermine effective utilization of the assets all persons bring to a work environment. Change at both of these dimensions results in Cultural Inclusion at the center, where “living diversity” takes place.

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