
Employees' Perceptions about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity: A Study of IT and ITeS Companies

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Abstract: In this digital age, where almost everything is getting mechanised, there is still no substitute for the human resource in any organization. With the advent of 21st century, the concept of workforce diversity has become an indispensable requirement for business operating in competitive global business environment. There are three approaches to diversity management viz. Discrimination and Fairness Approach, Access and Legitimacy Approach and Learning and Effectiveness Approach. The present study is aimed at identifying the perception of employees working in IT/ITeS companies about the approaches to manage workforce diversity. The present research is exploratory-cum-descriptive in nature. The data was collected through a well structured questionnaire from Gurgaon, Noida and Indore. The study concluded that in case of all the three demographic groups (gender, marital status and qualification) significant difference has been observed on the aspects viz., in the workgroup, it is believed that the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves; the differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas. Hence, in order to improve the organizational effectiveness, measures should be taken to promote learning from these cultural differences.

Key Words: Workforce Diversity, Diversity Management, Approaches to Diversity Management, Information technology, Information technology enabled Services.

Introduction

In today's era, an organization needs an ample stock of diverse workforce to meet the varied demands of its diverse customers. But, at the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that, in an organization, where there exists multicultural workforce; the chances of misunderstandings, ego-clashes, prejudice, miscommunication etc. are quite usual. So, the managers of the organization need to learn the ways, through which these issues can be managed or handled properly. Thus, the need of the hour is to train the managers on multicultural perspectives, not only to effectively interact with the cross-border customers and suppliers, but also with their own employees. This is because, in the end, its the employees who have to serve the diverse customers. The 1990's saw the development of a new trend in the form of workforce diversity mainly because of liberalization and globalization of markets (**Jain and Verma, 1996**).

Today's managers to be successful need to be well acquainted with the various cultural beliefs, values, norms, etc., as the awareness of the culture can greatly ease the problem of managing a diverse workforce in today's organizations, which are now represented by people from different cultures. In the present time, liberalization, privatization and globalisation have resulted in bringing the people from diverse cultural backgrounds closer and thereby the need has arisen to cater to the requirements of such a varied group. Hence, diversity management becomes a very important aspect of the organization. Workforce diversity simply means how heterogeneous the workforce of the organization is. According to **Moorhead and Griffin** "Workforce diversity is basically concerned with the similarities and differences in such characteristics as age, gender, ethnic, heritage, physical abilities and disabilities, race and sexual orientation among the employees of the organization". With the advent of 21st century, the concept of workforce diversity has become an indispensable apprehension for business. There is no second thought that in this digital age, where almost everything is getting mechanised, there is still no replacement for the human resource in any organization.

Approaches / Paradigms to Diversity Management

Thomas and Ely (1998) identified three paradigms for managing diversity. The brief description about the approaches is as follows:-

1. *Discrimination and Fairness Approach*: This approach focuses on making proactive programmes for ensuring equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment and observance of Equal Employment Opportunity conditions for everyone. Companies following this approach normally introduce mentoring and career- development programmes explicitly for the women and people of minority caste and train other employees as well to respect cultural differences. The essential driving force of this approach is to eliminate prejudice from the workplace and to promote an understanding of cultural differences. Under this concept, the success of this paradigm is determined on the basis of the extent to which the organization is able to attain its recruitment and retention goals instead of the extent to which the work environment of the organization encourage the employees to bring into play their capabilities and viewpoints to carry out their work more efficiently. Though as per this paradigm, the staff gets diversified, but the work does not. The diversification of workforce does not influence the work culture of the organization and leadership could not exploit the potential benefits of diversity (Thomas and Ely, 1998).

2. *Access and Legitimacy Approach*: The approach focuses on the acceptance and utilization of the differences among employees to cater the diverse customer groups. Organizations applying this approach, believe that the marketplace is culturally diverse and hence can present an opportunity or a threat for them. Thus, the organizations or the companies work on improving the diversity of its workforce as they understand the need of having the employees who possess multi-skills and that too in more than one language so that the customers can be understood and served in a better way and thus gain legitimacy with them. Diversity is not just fair; it makes business sense. "Celebration of differences" concept basically categorizes the employees into jobs that suit their niche or "cultural background". However, the diverse employees often feel exploited as the opportunities in the other parts of the organization are not open to them. Further, in adverse business scenario or downsizing, the special department' employees are the most vulnerable to lose their job.

3. *Learning and Effectiveness Approach*: This learning and effectiveness approach aims at integrating employees by recognizing that cultural differences are an important source of organizational learning. The differences are valued and are made a part of the core business processes. The organization following this approach believes in an open discussion and ensures respect for differences. The approach aims at developing positive diversity climate and thereby promoting a culture of integration. The organization internalizes differences among employees by putting itself in the shoes of the employees to understand their different perspectives and thus finding the ways of increasing the effectiveness. This learning contributes to the growth of the organization and thus, the team spirit is inculcated among the employees from different cultural backgrounds. They feel valued and respected. To facilitate this approach needs bureaucratic, egalitarian structure. Further, organizational culture needs to encourage openness and set high standards of performance for employees. (Thomas and Ely, 1998).

Review of Literature

Afzal, et. al. (2013) conducted a study with an aim to explain the extent of differences found amongst the workers employed in private and public sector companies. The study also aimed at finding out the impact of workforce diversity on the profits, output and performance of the organization. The study revealed that diversity exists in every organization, but more in the private sector as compared to public sectors. It also came to light that more diversity is found at middle and lower levels as compared to the senior or top levels of the workforce. Gender - Specific diversity is usually found in private sector business organizations. It was also observed that most of the public sector organizations are still lagging behind as compared to the private sector organizations with regard to diversity management.

Munjuri and Maina (2013) undertook the study to find out the impact of diversity management on the output or performance of Kenyan bank employees. It brought into the light that the policies like diversity training, help or support to minority balanced recruitment etc were used by the bank. It was also observed that the only measurement tool for employee's compensation was the employees' education and performance ability. The study proved that the performance of both managerial and non managerial staff of the bank was affected by workforce diversity and that too in varying degrees. However, the greatest impact was noticed on the managers and less impact on the non-managerial employees. They concluded that the performance of the employees and the average productivity of the bank employees when classified on the basis of gender, age and education level were significantly associated.

Patrick and Kumar (2012) undertook a study to understand the approach or outlook of the employees towards workplace diversity. They also aimed at first finding out the prospective or probable barriers to workplace diversity and then suggesting the measures or strategies to remove those barriers and thereby ensuring more degree of inclusiveness and diversity in the workplace. The study found that diversity needs to be incorporated in the employees of the organization as a cultural value, so as to bring about a positive change in the corporate culture. It came to light that discrimination is the one of the top most hurdles in the path of workplace diversity acceptance. The study concluded that proper diversity management can result in fetching some constructive changes in the employees and thus making them more committed and satisfied and thereby leading to increase in their productivity and finally making an addition to the financial image or performance of the organization.

Ehimare and Ogage-Oghene (2011) made a study in a Nigerian Bank to find out what effect does workforce diversity has on the organizational effectiveness. The study concluded that workforce diversity's impact on organizational effectiveness got minimal, when regulated by workgroup contexts. The results of the study suggested that company's official were not able to notice the positive correlation between organizational effectiveness and workforce diversity. Instead, the effects were expected to be established on the basis of the strategies adopted by the company and the response towards diversity management by the seniors and employees of the organization.

Pathak (2011) discussed about the various areas of need for the employees to 'understand and value' the differences among them. The study stressed on the need of the organization to train its employees about diversity and its benefits for the organization. The study came out with a conclusion that ignoring diversity leads to additional cost in terms of time, money, and efficiency. And, thus also add up to a number of problems for the organization such as unhealthy tensions which further lead to loss of productivity, increased disagreements and complaints and legal actions, and incapability to attract and keep talented cum valuable staff members thus adding up to hiring and training costs.

Choi and Rainey (2010) conducted a study to examine the impact of diversity (in race, gender and age) as well as the moderators such as diversity management, organizational culture, etc. on the perception of the employees about organizational performance in U.S Federal agencies by applying the technique of hierarchical regression analysis. The findings of the study concluded that there is a negative relationship between organizational performance and racial diversity. But, positive relationship between racial diversity and organizational performance is reflected, when team processes and diversity management policies are used as moderators to racial diversity. It was also observed that interactions of diversity in terms of gender and age with the contextual variables gave mixed outcomes, indicating thereby that gender and age diversity carry complex association.

Soldan (2009) conducted a survey- based study in one of the largest Australian government agencies with an aim to practically evaluate the extent to which employee's perceived management receptivity to diversity management (PMRDM) varies across gender, ethnicity, age and organizational tenure. The study also intended to examine the effects of various dimensions of organizational climate for diversity (OCFD) on PMRDM. The sample for the study consisted of 391 employees; out of whom 32% of respondents were in management /supervisory positions, while 68% were at non-managerial positions. A 7-point Likert scale was used. For the analysis of the data, t-tests, ANOVA, Bivariate correlation, Regression analysis techniques were used. The findings disclosed that PMRDM varies on the basis of organizational tenure only, with the employees of having less than one year of tenure of

service perceive that management is receptive to diversity management in comparison to those with 6 to 10 years and over 10 years of tenure of service. In addition to this, status, fairness, inclusion, and treatment were found as the predictors of PMRDM out of the 13 predictor variables, and thereby explaining 63% of the variance in PMRDM. The study suffered from various limitations such as: (a) the study focused only on respondent's gender, ethnicity, age, status and organizational tenure as dimensions to diversity. Secondly, there was an unexplained variance of 37%.

Stevens, F.G.et.al. (2008) in their study discussed about the types of diversity-initiatives which are most commonly put into practice in the organizations viz. colour-blindness and multiculturalism. It was also examined as to how well these approaches deal with the exclusive needs of both minorities and non-minorities to connect with the organizations. An altogether new approach, namely AIM (all-inclusive-multiculturalism) was brought by them in regard to managing organizational diversity so as to rectify the limitations of both the colour-blind and multiculturalism approaches to diversity. The AIM approach basically aims at cultivating the feelings of employee inclusion and thereby providing a starting point for bringing positive change in the organization.

Thus, from the above literature relating to the previous studies which reflect the views of different authors, it can be summarized that diversity is basically a concept which prevails in every organization, more in private sector and less in public sectors and also more in middle levels and less in top levels of management. It was also found in one of the studies that the workforce diversity affects the performance of both – managerial as well as non-managerial staff and that too in varying degrees. One of the studies found that discrimination is one of the top most constraints in the way of diversity acceptance but, the same can be tackled with proper diversity management. Ignoring diversity in the organization can result in a number of issues such as increased disagreements, loss of productivity, complaints etc. It was also being put forward by one of the study that AIM i.e. all-inclusive-multiculturalism approach is a helping tool which aims at cultivating the feelings of employee inclusion and thereby providing a starting point for bringing positive change in the organization.

Need of the Study

The foregoing review of literature reveals that not much research has been done to study the perception of employees about the approaches used by the organization for workforce diversity management. Therefore, the present study entitled "Employee's Perception about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity: A study of IT and ITeS Companies" has been chosen for the study so that more light can be thrown on this aspect and can thus add to the existing body of knowledge and thereby can prove a helping hand to corporates and the future researchers.

Objective and Methodology

The main objective of the study is to examine the perceptions of the employees about the different approaches to manage workforce diversity.

Research Hypothesis

To validate the results of the present study, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the perception of the employees about the approaches to manage workforce diversity with regard to demographic factors viz. gender, marital status, and qualification.

Sample Profile

The present research is exploratory-cum-descriptive in nature. Judgement sampling method was used for collecting data from the employees of certain selected IT and ITeS companies located at Gurgaon, Noida and Indore. The final sample size of respondents was 280. The data was collected through a well structured questionnaire on a Likert scale, i.e., from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Further, the data was tabulated and edited for final analysis. To analyze the data, a set of simple statistical techniques such as cross tabulation, percentage, mean, standard deviation (S.D) were used. To test the hypotheses, t-test technique was applied.

Results and Discussions

This section covers the results of the study, which are as under:

Gender-Wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Table 1 shows the gender-wise comparison of perception of employees about the approaches to manage workforce diversity. Perception of the male employees is that, the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves (Mean =4.70, SD=0.70) is placed at the top. This is followed by the view that diversity brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups (Mean =4.67, SD=0.60), and further, the employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity *etc.* (Mean =2.79, SD=1.53) is placed at the bottom. Perception of the female employees is that, the differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas is placed at the top (Mean =4.70, SD=0.56). This is followed by the view that, differences between people are shared and respected in the organization (Mean =4.67, SD=0.52), and further, differences between people are ignored in the Workgroup (Mean =2.88, SD=1.63) is placed at the bottom. Statistically, t-test results showed that there is a significant difference between the gender-wise perception of the employees towards the subsequent approaches to manage workforce diversity that are : people believe in ignoring differences to maintain harmony in the organization (p=0.009), the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves (p=0.029), people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally (p=0.000), differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas (p=0.009) .Therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is rejected at 5 percent level of significance, in case of these aspects of workforce diversity management approaches. However, no significant difference has been obtained between the mean scores of remaining aspects of the three approaches in case of two groups.

Marital Status wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Table 2 shows the marital status-wise comparison of perception of employees about the approaches to manage workforce diversity. Perception of the single/unmarried employees is that, the diversity

brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups is placed at the top (Mean =4.65, SD=0.61). This is followed by the view that the differences between people are shared and respected (Mean =4.65, SD=0.58), and further, the employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity *etc.* (Mean =2.96, SD=1.63) is placed at the bottom. Whereas, the perception of the married employees is that, the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves is placed at the top (Mean =4.78, SD=0.51). This is followed by the view that the differences between people are shared and respected in the organization (Mean =4.65, SD=0.50), and further, employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity *etc.* (Mean =2.84, SD=1.40) is placed at the bottom. Statistically, t-test results showed that there is a significant difference between the marital status-wise perception of the employees towards the subsequent approaches to manage workforce diversity that are: the employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity *etc.* ($p=0.000$), the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves in the work group ($p=0.000$) and differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas in the organization ($p=0.033$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected at 5 percent level of significance in case of above mentioned three aspects of approaches. However, no significant difference has been found between the mean scores of two groups in case of remaining aspects of the three strategies.

Qualification-wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Table 3 shows the qualification -wise comparison of perception of employees about the approaches to manage workforce diversity. Perception of undergraduate employees is that, the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves is placed at the top (Mean =4.69, SD=0.66). This is followed by the view that diversity brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups (Mean =4.68, SD=0.64), and further, employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity *etc.* (Mean =2.81, SD=1.54) is placed at the bottom. Whereas, the perception of the post graduate employees is that, the differences between people are shared and respected is placed at the top (Mean =4.56, SD=0.71). This is followed by the view that people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally (Mean=4.46, SD=0.62), and further, differences between people are ignored in the workgroup (Mean =3.35, SD=1.67) is placed at the bottom. The results of t-test showed that the employees differ significantly on the basis of their qualification, towards the subsequent approaches to manage workforce diversity that are: the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves ($p=0.000$), differences between people are shared and respected in the organization ($p=0.042$) and differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas in the work group ($p=0.011$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected at 5 percent level of significance, in case of these three aspects of approaches. The undergraduates have exhibited higher level of agreement than the postgraduates, in case of all the three statements. Further, maximum difference is found in case of Learning and Effectiveness approach. While no differences has been observed in case of Discrimination and Fairness Approach.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a significant difference between the gender-wise perception of the employees towards the subsequent approaches that are: people believe in ignoring differences to maintain harmony in the organization, the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves, people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally,

differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas in the work group. It was also found that there is a significant difference between the marital status-wise perception of the employees towards the approaches that, the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity etc., the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves and differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas in the work group, as approaches to manage workforce diversity. The employees also differ significantly on the basis of their qualification towards the subsequent approaches to manage workforce diversity that are, the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves, differences between people are shared and respected in the organization and differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas in the work group. Thus, in case of all the three demographic groups, significant difference has been observed on the aspects viz., in the workgroup, it is believed that the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves; the differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas. Thus, measures should be adopted to promote learning from these cultural differences in order to improve organizational effectiveness. Thus, IT and ITeS Companies can improve their competitiveness by linking employees' learning and effectiveness along with market access and legitimacy approach.

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Table 1

Gender-wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Approaches	Statements	Male (N=197)		Female (N=83)		Independent Samples t-test	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	t	Sign.
Discrimination and Fairness Approach	In my work group, differences between people are ignored.	3.29	1.67	2.88	1.63	0.138	0.711
	In my work group, people believe in ignoring differences to maintain harmony in the organization.	4.29	1.19	3.96	1.52	7.019	0.009*
	In my work group, employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity etc.	2.79	1.53	3.23	1.57	0.168	0.682
Access and Legitimacy Approach	In my work group, views from diverse groups are seen as irrelevant to the firm's core business.	4.13	1.04	4.22	1.13	1.911	0.168
	In my work group, it is believed that the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves.	4.70	0.70	4.53	0.79	4.845	0.029*
	In my work group, diversity brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups.	4.67	0.60	4.57	0.72	2.621	0.107
Learning and Effectiveness Approach	In my organization, people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally.	4.54	0.62	4.31	0.78	13.493	0.000*
	In my organization, differences between people are shared and respected.	4.64	0.57	4.67	0.52	0.138	0.711
	In my work group, differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas.	4.47	0.94	4.70	0.56	7.019	0.009*

Source: Primary Data, Data processed through PASW 18.0.

Note: *Significant at 5 percent level of significance

Table 2

Marital Status wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Approaches	Statements	Single (N=188)		Married (N=92)		Independent Samples t-test	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	t	Sign.
Discrimination and Fairness Approach	In my work group, differences between people are ignored.	3.09	1.69	3.34	1.61	3.400	0.066
	In my work group, people believe in ignoring differences to maintain harmony in the organization	4.09	1.37	4.42	1.12	3.166	0.076
	In my work group, employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity etc.	2.96	1.63	2.84	1.40	13.620	0.000*
Access and Legitimacy Approach	In my work group, views from diverse groups are seen as irrelevant to the firm's core business.	4.18	1.11	4.12	0.96	2.743	0.099
	In my work group, it is believed that the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves.	4.58	0.81	4.78	0.51	16.281	0.000*
	In my work group, diversity brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups.	4.65	0.61	4.61	0.71	1.100	0.295
Learning and Effectiveness Approach	In my organization, people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally.	4.47	0.70	4.49	0.64	1.036	0.310
	In my organization, differences between people are shared and respected.	4.65	0.58	4.65	0.50	0.215	0.643
	In my work group, differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas.	4.51	0.94	4.61	0.63	4.608	0.033*

Source: Primary Data, Data processed through PASW 18.0.

Note: *Significant at 5 percent level of significance

Table 3

Qualification-wise Comparison of Perception of Employees about the Approaches to Manage Workforce Diversity

Approaches	Statements	Under Graduate (N=232)		Post Graduate (N=48)		Independent Samples t-test	
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	t	Sign.
Discrimination and Fairness Approach	In my work group, differences between people are ignored.	3.13	1.67	3.35	1.67	0.324	0.570
	In my work group, people believe in ignoring differences to maintain harmony in the organization.	4.17	1.35	4.33	1.06	3.361	0.068
	In my work group, employees feel that the organization does not take notice of race, gender and ethnicity etc.	2.81	1.54	3.46	1.54	0.373	0.542
Access and Legitimacy Approach	In my work group, views from diverse groups are seen as irrelevant to the firm's core business.	4.14	1.06	4.25	1.08	0.061	0.805
	In my work group, it is believed that the clients want to look inside the company and see people like themselves.	4.69	0.66	4.44	0.99	12.585	0.000*
	In my work group, diversity brings better knowledge about clients from diverse groups.	4.68	0.64	4.44	0.62	1.779	0.183
Learning and Effectiveness Approach	In my organization, people are encouraged to recognize and value differences between people equally.	4.48	0.69	4.46	0.62	0.957	0.329
	In my organization, differences between people are shared and respected.	4.67	0.51	4.56	0.71	4.159	0.042*
	In my work group, differences between people are considered as a source of new ideas.	4.58	0.78	4.35	1.12	6.636	0.011*

Source: Primary Data, Data processed through PASW 18.0.

Note: *Significant at 5 percent level of significance