

MANAGING DIVERSITY IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY GLOBAL ECONOMY

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The world is spinning and spinning faster than ever before in different spheres- economic, political, social, and cultural. It's difficult to say which is accurate: that we are at an inflection point or past it already. The impacts of macro-social and macro-economic forces and globalization that have spun out of those have had broad-based implications for economic systems of nations, and businesses organizations have been affected in many ways. Forward-looking business organizations (small or large) see a challenge therein to embrace and adjust their organization to the new dynamics of a different- remarkably different-environment than they knew half a century ago. This is true especially for traditional, well-established corporations with long operational history.

For forward-looking businesses, working to make the most of a mix of people representing varying ideas, racial origins, cultures, beliefs and values have emerged as a priority. Truly modern business corporations necessarily pay attention to diversity management and its influence on new markets, revenue streams, product and service offerings, and employee recruitment and retention. This task has proved to be of a different nature – one not to be kept aside for the Human Resource personnel to manage as a departmental function - suggesting a new approach to dealing with a familiar but increasingly weighty issue in the modern twenty first century workplace.

Diversity management, according to the U.S Department of Defense's Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), is "understanding, valuing and managing differences and similarities to obtain enhanced communication and increased productivity in any environment where human interaction is a relevant factor. The definition is intentionally broad and capable of including a wide range of strategies, activities and efforts". Managing diversity is a responsibility that every corporate C-suite executive and department head must embrace as part of their job description, and make part of their business plan and budget. It must be ingrained in how they think, act and innovate. It means looking beyond the obvious, understanding and leveraging what previously were considered a drain of useful time and resources especially in a corporate culture obsessed with measuring ROIs and monitoring budgets. Business organizations truly committed to pursuing innovation in an increasingly hypercompetitive world must look closely at the subtle signs of great strength that lie within the human talent mix of diverse people. Ron Glover, Chief Diversity Officer at IBM says, "Innovation is about looking at complex problems and bringing new views to the table. Diversity has allowed IBM to be innovative and successful for 100 years and to work across lines of differences in 172 countries, amongst 427,000 employees."

A paradigm shift from favoring a group over the others in work and recruitment settings must be made not occasionally but culturally- seen in everyday processes of businesses. Creating a new and level playing field rooted in company culture is the new front of the shift. Employees, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientations, political and religious affiliations should be made to feel a strong sense of belonging in the workplace and equal opportunities for contribution and professional growth. Prospective employees are not to be left out of the equation. Human Resource departments in the recruitment process should consistently strive to send their corporation's message of diversity acceptance and its management approach to job candidates whether this is done by direct and open communication or indirectly by the implementing fair selection ratios on gender, race and other areas in a way that reflect true acknowledgement of a changing global workforce. Such practices will help grow and strengthen the organization's brand positioning and set it up on a path to remarkable business growth.

Diversity management leadership must develop within businesses and act on growing cross-cultural education and thinking even against the push of those who view it as a bore and noisy reminder of what is obvious in plain sight or another attempt at irrelevant advocacy. Thought leaders within corporations should sustain their intellectual reasoning and communicate new perspectives on diversity to employees in the workplace.

Personal branding must be activated and encouraged in individual employees to be their authentic themselves and strengthen the core of their identity, staying culturally intelligent about themselves and others in order to enable higher levels of workplace performance; market and sell in more authentic ways; and enjoy sustainable growth and profitability in the new markets as a befitting result.

Modern digital technologies especially in social media and mobile communication systems should be used to drive the message of cross-cultural awareness and acceptance within corporations and to the publics as a strong channel for brand positioning, reach and engagement.

Businesses that see themselves in the picture painted above will have to start on the path to excelling at diversity management by adopting a global market perspective and mindset (seeing the big whole picture), giving more time and thought to understanding diversity by undertaking internal social research programs or external consultations, and acting on knowledge results to tap into a diverse global talent pool to grow their businesses, become and stay globally competitive.

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