WORKPLACE DIVERSITY – ADAPT OR PERISH

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ABSTRACT

The world is increasingly becoming a global village with boundaries becoming insignificant by the day. Not only internationally, but even domestically we are seeing increased mobility of the workforce creating a diverse mix of ethnic, gender, racial, caste, creed, culture & sensitivities in today's workforce. And it is but obvious, that when such a diverse mix of people with such diverse backgrounds, come together to work for the same company, the differences are bound to create unprecedented problems which would go on to cause long term damage to the very fabric of the organization.

No organization is immune to such diversity at workplace and no organization can bury its head in the sand and pretend that it will be able to ward off such diversity at its workplace. Therefore, it is time for organization's to step forward & adapt to this workplace diversity in a matured manner, and take the opportunity, as some companies in the case studies given in this paper have done so, to convert this so-called disadvantage, into an opportunity for growth & excellence. This paper throws light on case studies of two major IT giants who have taken the proverbial bull of diversity head-on by the horns and have converted it into their strength.

The message this paper conveys is that either the organizations adapt to this phenomenon, or perish in the absence of such adaptability because workplace diversity is here to stay for times to come.

Keywords: *Diversity, Workplace Diversity, Discrimination*

Introduction

Today, as we all know and are very well aware, the world is shrinking – we are now part of a global village & boundaries between countries are becoming more & more insignificant. We are witnessing a trend such as never before, of global citizens, who are born in one country, are brought up in other countries, and end up working in other countries. Not only has this trend spread internationally, even domestic boundaries have blurred significantly. It is very common to see a cross-movement of people between states in search of better prospects & better quality of life.

When we speak about so much transition of people, domestically as well as internationally, one cannot help but think about the kind of circumstances that may come about when people of diverse cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, genders, sensitivities come together to work under one organization. Problems are bound to crop up due to acceptance and tolerance levels being different. Very often, the issues created by such differences assume mammoth proportions and the organizational objectives get left far behind and all the time, energy & focus of resources is trained on these differences, leading to a criminal waste of valuable resources of production.

Work place diversity refers to the extent to which an organization is culturally diverse. Cultural diversity includes the range of ways in which people experience a unique group identity, which includes gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and age, etc. An organization's culture tends to determine the extent to which it is culturally diverse. While diversity at workplace brings out many benefits to the organization; it can also lead to

many challenges. It is the responsibility of the mangers within the organizations to use diversity as an influential resource in order to enhance organizational effectiveness

Diversity is beneficial to both organizations and members. Diversity brings substantial potential benefits such as better decision making and improved problem solving, greater creativity and innovation, which leads to enhanced product development and more successful marketing to different types of customers. It provides organization with the ability to compete in global markets. Diverse organizations will be successful as long as there is sufficient amount of information within them. Because people from different cultures perceive messages in different ways, Communication is vital to the performance of the organization. Miscommunication within a diverse workplace will lead to a great deal of challenges.

Having seen the above, it is pertinent to note that there are challenges to managing a diverse work population as well. Managing diversity is more than simply acknowledging difference in people. Many organizational theorists have suggested reasons that work teams highly diverse in work relevant characteristics can be difficult to motivate and manage. There are many challenges which face culturally diverse workplaces, and a major challenge is miscommunication within an organization. Cultural bias is an additional factor which challenges culturally diverse work environments. Cultural bias includes both **prejudice** and **discrimination**. "Prejudice refers to negative attitudes toward an organization member based on his/her culture group identity, and discrimination refers to observable adverse behaviour for the same reason".

Literature Review

Priscilla Dike (2013) in her research thesis studied how companies manage workforce diversity and its consequences to the company's existence as well as examined how companies' deal with challenges that come with employees from diverse cultural backgrounds. The study was conducted on five major companies in Finland & Ghana. The result showed that workplace diversity plays an effective role in some companies, however, inadequate mentoring and guidance could cause a company low productivity. For this reason there must be regular improvement in ways to effectively manage a diverse workforce as the world keeps advancing

Indrawati Nataatmadia & Laurel Evelyn Dyson, (2007) in their study observed that Diversity is a reality in the modern workplace across the globe. A culturally diverse workforce can present some disadvantages for an organization, however if managed well it can yield many advantages, such as developing employee and organisational potential, improving customer service and business growth, and also enhancing creativity and problem solving

Maj. Molly K. Moon, (1997) in her study, "Understanding the impact of cultural diversity on organizations", presents information on the importance of understanding the impact of cultural diversity on organizations. Starting with a historical background of how the military has handled diversity, the stages from "grudging acceptance" to "valuing differences and managing diversity" are explained. It further lays a foundation by discussing several factors such as stereotyping, prejudice and ethnocentrism that affect the diversity climate as presented in a model developed by Taylor Cox, Jr

Robin J. Ely & David A. Thomas (2001), in their paper developed the theory about the conditions under which cultural diversity enhances or detracts from work group functioning. From qualitative research in three culturally diverse organizations, they identified three different perspectives on workforce diversity: the integration-and learning perspective, the access-and-legitimacy perspective, and the discrimination-and-fairness perspective. The perspective on diversity a work group held influenced how people expressed and managed tensions related to diversity, whether those who had been traditionally underrepresented in the organization felt respected and valued by their colleagues, and how people interpreted the meaning of their racial identity at work

Statement of the Problem

Today, almost no organization exists, which does not have to face workplace diversity in at least one of the several forms of diversity. No organization remains untouched by these issues and many find themselves at cross-roads, by way of the attitude of the top management towards such issues and the levels of tolerance of such diversity, as well as attitude which percolates down below, which actually creates the ground reality – on the shop floor, where it can either make or break the organization. The time has come for every organization to wake up to this harsh reality and accept for a fact that by behaving like the proverbial ostrich and burying its head in the sand, the problem will not go away. Every company in today's times is bound to face the issue of work place diversity and it has to adapt to this phenomenon and address it with maturity & establish a precedent

for the organization members to follow by inculcating this diversity by taking it into its stride and converting it into a beneficial opportunity. Any organization failing to do so, will have sentenced itself to doom and will have to face the dire consequences of having ignored today's vital reality.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to bring out, with the help of prominent case studies of two leading organizations in the world, how work place diversity can be handled effectively by taking proactive steps, and thereby, a problem can be converted into an opportunity or an advantage, which can be leveraged for further growth.

Managing Diversity at Workplace

Managing diversity goes far beyond the limits of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. High performing diversity managers recognize that specialized skills are necessary for creating a productive, diverse workforce. They seek out continuous learning opportunities and some go as far as acquiring certification. Managers must be willing to work towards changing the organization in order to create a culture of diversity and inclusion. Assessment skills and diversity education are key elements of culture change

Diversity issues change over time, depending on local historical and dynamic conditions. Overt "diversity programs" are usually limited to large employers, government agencies and businesses facing rapid demographic changes in their local labor pool and help people work and understand each other

The two major IT czars **Intel** and **Cisco** are best examples to explain diversity initiatives in an organization. The various initiatives carried out at Intel and Cisco are proof that employees are no longer treated as machines but are considered as an asset to an organization.

Case Study No.1 : INTEL

Intel Corporation is the world's largest semi conductor chip maker based on revenue. The Company is the inventor of x 86 series of microprocessors, the processors found in most personal computers. Intel was founded on July 18 1968 as Integrated Electronics Corporation and is based in Santa Clara, California, USA. Intel was founded by semiconductor pioneers Robert Noyce and Gordon Moore and is widely associated with the executive leadership and vision of Andrew Grove. Intel combines advanced chip design capability with leading edge manufacturing capability, originally known primarily to engineers and technologists. Intel's "Intel Inside" advertising campaign of the 1990's made it and its Pentium processor household names

Intel pushes the boundaries of innovation thus making peoples life more exciting, fulfilling and manageable. Their network never stops, and they never stop looking for the next leap ahead in technology, education, culture, manufacturing and social responsibility. Intel never stops striving to deliver solutions with greater benefits for everyone.

Diversity at Intel

Intel is a leader in innovative technologies that change the way people live and work. Intel's success is due to the efforts of the global, diverse workforce. Intel is committed to investing in employees and celebrating the myriad of cultures, lifestyles experiences and ideas they have to offer.

Vision

At Intel, diversity is a way of life. It's the way they do business and the key to its success as an innovative leader in technology.

Diverse Workforce

The diversity of Intel's employees is the ingredient for success that sets Intel apart. Its employees are located all over the world and represent a variety of different backgrounds, yet each person has one thing in common- a commitment to create market driving products and technology designed to make a difference The perspectives, abilities and experiences of the workforce are key to the success of the company and fundamental to its role as a technology leader. Through the innovative thoughts and actions, the employees, based in over 40 countries, have proven that it is possible to impact and change the way that people live and work around the world.

Valuing Individual Perspectives

Intel was built on great ideas and core values including discipline, quality and risk taking. They honor, value and celebrate the unique viewpoints of their employees, communities, customers, suppliers, and other partners in the global marketplace. Intel is committed to creating a work environment that is stimulating and inspirational.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Intel respects values and welcomes diversity in its workforce as well as its customers, its suppliers and the global marketplace. Its policy is to provide equal employment opportunities for all applicant and employees. Intel does not discriminates on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, disability, veteran status, marital status, gender identity or sexual orientation. This policy applies to all aspects and stages of employment from recruitment through retirement. It prohibits harassment of any individual or group.

Affirmative action

As a U.S. government contractor, Intel is committed to ensure that women, minorities, people with disabilities, veterans, and other diverse groups are appropriately represented in the workplace. Each year, Intel prepares an affirmative action plan to assess its workforce diversity and to address any possible areas of under-representation.

Open doors, open minds

Open Doors guidelines encourage employees at every level, regardless of their title or role, to raise issues and to expect a timely response and resolution. Intel regularly conducts worldwide internal organizational surveys that include diversity aspects, and it shares these survey results and their related action plans with its employees. This open exchange of ideas and concerns promotes a fair and respectful workplace for all of Intel's employees worldwide.

Intel's most Valuable Asset- "Its People"

Studies show that employees working in a diverse environment tend to feel more fulfilled, creative and productive on the job. They also tend to experience higher levels of positive morale and job satisfaction. At Intel, these factors contribute directly towards making the company a great place to work, create, and innovate. Intel's employees bring a unique and valued perspective to Intel. Their creativity, productivity and experience make it possible for Intel to remain innovative and competitive. Intel's continued success as a company depends on its ability to meet the needs of its global, diverse workforce. Intel is dedicated to make its environment a place where its employees thrive creatively and intellectually

Intel's employees' faces reflect those of its customers, vendors, and colleagues in the global market. This worldwide perspective makes it possible for the company to anticipate and provide for the growing needs of a changing marketplace.

Diversity as a strategy

Calculated risk-taking is an important element of Intel's culture. Fab Materials Operations—Silicon, a department located within the Technology and Manufacturing Group (TMG), brought this value to life when its leaders decided to consciously build workforce diversity into their strategy for maximizing team effectiveness. Through thoughtful implementation, the team was able to deliberately use tactics such as job swapping and controlled employee role changes to increase the efficiency of their teams. Their intentional blending of talent from a variety of backgrounds, geographies, previous work experience, and areas of expertise resulted in the achievement of rock-solid business continuity, an unparalleled reduction in excursions, and an almost zero percent undesired turnover rate since 2001.

Diversity Inspires

Intel's workforce diversity played a direct role in creating and ensuring the success of Intel Corporate Services' (CS) global conference INSPIRE (International Summit for Proliferating Ideas and Recognizing Excellence). This unique event brings together innovators and leaders from all levels, groups, and countries within Intel

Corporate Services, a division of TMG. As a result of its success, the INSPIRE concept has been proliferated across other TMG groups and IT. The role that diversity has played in this project has now been designed into the planning process: each year, more than half of the members of the INSPIRE steering committee are new, ensuring that the benefits of diverse perspectives are present each year.

A Real Life Case Study of How Intel used Diversity effectively to create a revolutionary product Intel® Centrino® processor technology:

Throughout Intel history, its employees have challenged the status quo by contributing to the success of its landmark products. To create Intel Centrino processor technology, a first-ever platform combining outstanding mobile performance, great battery life and integrated wireless LAN capability, Intel tapped directly into the ingenuity   of   its   diverse   workforce.

Intel's talented mobile engineering teams based in Israel and the U.S. collaborated on platform development. Its mobile marketing and business development teams combined their expertise to drive strategies enabling the deployment of WLAN infrastructures and public wireless hotspots around the globe.

By connecting employees from different geographies, backgrounds and experience, Intel was able to utilize their unique talents to create a product that has revolutionized the way that people live and work. This combination of unique ideas and fearless risk-taking ultimately transformed the company.

Case Study No.2 : CISCO

Cisco Systems, Inc. is an American multinational corporation that designs and sells consumer electronics, networking and communications technology and services. Headquartered in San Jose, California; Cisco has more than 65,000 employees and annual revenue of US$36.11 billion as of 2009. At Cisco, they believe diversity in their employee population is a key business advantage. An inclusive workplace positions Cisco to anticipate market demand, be responsive to all of their customers, and build a solid foundation for future growth.

Employee Diversity

At Cisco, meeting their business objectives directly correlates to cultivating an inclusive workforce. Employees from different cultures and geographies, with a variety of viewpoints and styles of interaction, combine their unique backgrounds, experiences, and values to understand the needs of the customers. As a leading global company, Cisco recognizes that diversity of thought is a business imperative. By attracting, hiring, developing, and retaining the best talent, Cisco is able to explore new ideas, promote better decision making, and create a workforce that mirrors their customers and the world at large.

Gender diversity at Cisco:
- 50 percent of new hires in the past four quarters in finance and corporate communications are female.
- Nearly 40 percent of new hires in the past four quarters in operations and marketing are female.
- Approximately 25 percent of total new hires at Cisco are female.

Strategy adopted by Cisco to overcome the Gender diversity:

Cisco is well aware of the need for increased female participation in the industry. Within their own global operations, they dedicate programs and resources to help women develop their skills as managers and executives. In educational and social settings worldwide, Cisco actively leads and participates in activities to increase women's interests in careers in this industry. Their Gender Diversity Council, comprised of senior executive members representing every Cisco business function, identifies and seeks to diminish the barriers that inhibit a culture of inclusion, such as a shortage of role models and mentors. The Council oversees hiring, development and advancement, retention, and culture initiatives throughout the company.

Cisco believes that diversity of its employee population is a key business advantage. An inclusive workplace positions Cisco to anticipate market demand, be responsive to all their customers, and build a solid foundation for future growth. Cisco hires people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, skills, and points of view while promoting a common dedication across the company to teamwork, innovation, and customer success.

They offer numerous programs and services to support their diverse employee population:

1. Employee Networks
2. Diversity and Inclusion Education
3. Partnership with Professional Associations Championing Diversity
4. Support for Education
5. Women and Ethnic Minorities

Conclusion

In today's rapidly changing and diversifying world, the leading organizations of the 21st Century will be those that create a constant stream of innovative goods and services, winning customers and earning loyalty through exceptional performance. No one type of person, or group of people, has all the skills and talents needed to do this. Diversity is not only people who look different - it's also people who have different experiences. Recognizing the business advantages of embracing diversity, many organizations have successfully implemented diversity programs.

Nonetheless, workplace diversity still faces many barriers and challenges. Managing diversity is not easy, and undertaking a diversity initiative can backfire if the program is mismanaged, with long-reaching effects on employee satisfaction and productivity. Resistance to change among the workforce is usually due to stereotypes based on lack of information, fear of change, fears of discrimination, and a lack of understanding of the benefits associated with change. Effective training can often alleviate these fears and misunderstandings, increasing the possibility of a successful diversity initiative. Contrary to popular belief, the evidence doesn't support the idea that increasing diversity automatically translates into better performance; rather, it suggests that management must take a conscious, systemic approach.

Thus, an organization's commitment to diversity must be sustained. This leadership commitment requires the establishment of priorities and realistic objectives, the assessment and development of policies and practices to meet the particular diversity needs of the organization and the provision of management and employee training and support processes. In conclusion, it no amount of stress or emphasis would be enough in saying that the secret of success for today's organization's lies in the magical word "Adapt" in context of Workplace Diversity or it has to face the extreme end of the scale i.e. "Perish".

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