

Diversity in Workplace and Communication Efficacy: A Critical Review

Prof Pratima Rani Sardar^{1*}

^{1*}Department of Botany Shivaji College University of Delhi

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ABSTRACT

In a globalised world, where the professional workplaces are usually diverse, communication effectiveness and efficacy need to be the most important in maintaining the necessary cohesion in the workplace so that the linguistic and cultural barriers can be effectively managed to attain highest productivity. The present study seeks to figure out the role of leadership in evolving effective communication strategy so that inclusivity becomes the norm of communication strategy and an environment is created that can boost productivity and also human relations. Harnessing diversity is the need of the hour of the professional spaces and it should be the prime aspect of communication strategy. The paper seeks probe the role of transformational leadership in devising and implementing inclusive communication efficacy.

Keywords: Communication efficacy, Diversity, Inclusivity, leadership, Workplace

Introduction

In today's globalised world, workforce is diverse and it has to be to bring in talent from all across the world. Diversity in workforce is not just necessary but often boosts productivity of an organisation, provided the diverse workforce is managed well through an inclusive communication strategy, and that the leadership of the organisation should not just evolve such a strategy and implement it but also disseminate the culture of inclusivity within the organisation by setting personal examples. Diversity in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, language and cultural background often makes a workplace much more colourful, as different perspectives on the same thing are easily available within the organisation which can provide a diversity in problem-solving, critical thinking and decision making, so essential in doing business in today's time (**Cox and Blake, 1991**). Even though diversity in workforce has many benefits, there are also certain challenges which can hamper the organisation's productivity and therefore if the leadership, through appropriate communication strategy is not able to channelise the diversity toward the organisation's objectives, then diversity in workforce can also be counterproductive.

Diverse Workforce and Productivity

Communication is key to growth of an organisation and each organisation tries to develop a culture of communication of its own which is unique to the organisation and also very important in evolving the organisational culture. When the workforce is diverse, the communication and the cultural environment is such that the organisation need to careful in devising the communication culture so that no one's sentiment and sensibilities are hurt in the process of communication. Effective communication is the most significant in terms of managing diversity in workforce. Even though to many it may feel that too much diversity can be counterproductive, but many studies done across the world speaks otherwise. **Brett et al. (2006)** in their study emphasized how work-related diversity and organisational performance are directly linked to each other. **Rags and Kram (2007)** emphasise on the link between educational diversity and performance of an organisation, whereas **Donahue's (2001)** research on ethnic diversity in workplace too is seen as a positive contributor to organisational success. Thus, different studies across the world have emphasised on the need for workplace diversity and how organisational success is related to it. Diversity can, therefore, be a positive force in an organisation when it is used in a way that the organisation benefits from it, though, as stated, it can also be sometimes challenging.

Challenges of a Diverse Workforce

Workplace diversity needs to be integrated into a cohesive unit in an organisation with some effort because in many cases it is seen that because of certain lack of organisational policies and strategies diversity can lead to diverse problems. Some of the problems related to diversity are –

- **Stereotypes and Biases** – Often we have preconceived notions about people who are from other communities (linguistic or cultural or racial, etc) and therefore when we engage in conversation with those biases and stereotypes, the cohesion in workplace is not achieved because cultural and linguistic barriers comes up as a challenge. Not only in our views, but also in our body language and attitudes, the biases and stereotypes are evident which can a big deterrent in achieving cohesion in a team or an organisation. In many organisations, different kinds of glass ceilings exists and those glass ceilings can be a big deterrent in managing diversity as well as achieving organisational cohesion.
- **Lack of diversity training** – Diversity training is a must in today's time for make an organisation work in a proper way. Along with diversity training, etiquette training is essential as that can make the workforce aware of what all protocols and strategies to follow within and outside the organisation to achieve cohesion and thereby increase team productivity. Often organisations do not make the workforce have diversity training which make the workforce not understand the importance of an inclusive culture in workplace productivity.
- **Lack of leadership** – Leadership of any organisation decides the culture of the organisation as the leaders are followed by the employees. In other words, usually an organisation's culture is determined by its leadership and if the leaders do not have an inclusive temperament it percolates to the workforce. Leaders need to set an inclusive culture not just by setting examples, but also by evolving a protocol that would make the every member of an organisation follow the set guidelines of interacting with the peer group or with senior and juniors.

Due to these, it is necessary that any organisation which has and needs to have a diversity in workforce comes up with certain policies and strategies and those policies then should be implemented in the right spirit to manage diversity. Communication of these strategies through guidelines to the employees using different channels should be done.

Communication Efficacy to Manage Diversity in Workforce

The foremost important aspect of managing a diverse workforce is the communication strategy of an organisation. **Keyton (2011)** states that communication effectiveness is the ability of individuals and teams to interact in a way that exchange of messages and information are done with the intention of coordinating tasks, building professional relationships keeping in mind organisational productivity. **Ely and Thomas (2001)** are of the opinion that if properly managed through effective communication, diversity in workforce can lead to enhanced productivity. **Hofstede's (1980)** cultural dimensions theory emphasises how cultural differences can often lead a diverse workforce not to express opinions freely whereas **Stahl et al. (2010)** think that if inclusive leadership is involved then it is not an issue as transformational leadership is about making those changes in the working environment which can facilitate the utmost use of the talent and thereby can make any organisation shine bright.

Transformational leadership to Manage Diversity in Workforce

It is also necessary that the leadership of an organisation takes proactive steps in devising a communication strategy and then also provides adequate training to the workforce about the diversity and how by respecting the differences and by getting over stereotypes and biases one cannot just become a part of the great workforce but also be a better human being. It is a challenging task, but these are the challenges to be met in today's globalised world where the human resource managerial team has a very significant role to perform in diversity analysis and promoting inclusivity. Communication here does not only involve oral communication, but also nonverbal gestures, postures and etiquettes which are as diverse as the cultures. Etiquettes training therefore is a must to evolving an environment when professional interpersonal relationships can flourish. Similarly, as most of the work in today's time happens in a digital world where digital communication is very significant therefore evolving a netiquette specific to the organisation as well as training on those netiquette should be given to the workforce.

The role of leadership is important here as the leaders not only devise the strategy for the organisation but also at the same time through their own examples set the standards in the organisation for respecting the diversity and bringing inclusivity to all aspects of the organisation and personal work (**Groysberg and Connolly, 2013**). Inclusive and transformational leaders are a must for today's organisation especially for multinational organisations. **Barrett (2014)** thinks cultural competence training is a must for all workforce today whereas **Luthans and Doh (2018)** feels that communication protocols are very important. For a linguistically diverse team, **Neeley (2015)** suggested translation software and collaborative platforms are must so that the diverse workforce have ready references for themselves to deal with the diversity. Transformational leaders are the ones who can make the necessary adjustments in devising strategies and also in managing the workforce by inspiring them in innovative ways to make significant mark as a team. Transformational leaders are often the best in managing diverse workforce and to create that inclusive culture.

Different scholars have suggested different means to deal with diversity in workforce and the challenges faced. But what is more important to understand in this context is that any workforce for achieving cohesion as a team and to increase productivity of the organisation needs to be accommodative as **Giles (1973)** pointed out in his Communication Accommodation theory where he suggested that communication style needs to align to a particular protocol to facilitate a smoother interaction and thereby increase productivity. Being accommodative is a must for team or organisational cohesion and when it is diverse workforce, culturally accommodative spirit and mentality is the need of the hour. If the workforce is not directed to be accommodative then it can lead to certain kind of erosion of the work culture and thereby the productivity of the organisation can be hampered.

Conclusion.

To sum up, diversity in workforce of an organisation has several advantages and it is only by managing a diverse workforce that creativity and innovation can be brought in an organisation which can make the organisation be ahead of others and gain global recognition. When one gets over biases and stereotypes of any kind and thinks and communicates with an open mind, one is not just open to others' ideas but also in ready to think beyond what one has just learned and seen around oneself. Such an approach is not just important for organisation productivity but also for individual growth as it is only when one is open to all kinds of views and respects those views that one is able to bring forth certain innovative thinking in one's being. People who have an open mind are always open to cultural dialogue and it is the dialogic nature of an individual or an organisation which promotes the culture of growth. Cultural sensitivity is needed in becoming open to others and it should be a part of the education and training programmes so that overcoming stereotypes and biases are not difficult.

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