Workforce diversity and what you need to know

 Author: Thandeka Madziwanyika . January 2021

Introduction

Did you know that according to the PWC's 2020 Global Diversity and Inclusion Survey, 76% of organisations view diversity efforts to be of great importance for the organisation? While this is a high rate, it still leaves an alarming 33% of organisations viewing diversity as a setback for their business's progression. Making efforts to diversify an organisation should go past the idea of how businesses may perform.

With many beliefs on how women, for example, cannot manage in a corporate environment or how individuals living with disabilities will not be able to cope with the work environment, there needs to be more education in this area.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies struggled for survival yet still manage to go on and even improve on their business. This is no different, times are changing and so should the demographics in our organisations.

In this article, we will discuss what diversity is and everything you need to know about it.

What is Workforce diversity?

In research conducted by Saxena (2014), she provides us with a detailed explanation of what workforce diversity is. Workforce diversity means similarities and differences among employees in terms of age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. No two humans are alike. People are different in not only gender, culture, race, social and psychological characteristics but also in their perspectives and backgrounds. Society had discriminated on these aspects for centuries.

To have a more visual explanation of what workforce diversity is, the diagram below by Saxena (2014) will help:

Figure 1: The Key Variables of Workforce Diversity

Source: Saxena (2014, p.77)

Statistics on workforce diversity based on gender

LinkedIn (2020) surveyed global diversity trends based on gender. The figures show a great improvement in how they looked ten years ago. This is a commendable effort and a step in the right direction.

Area	Gender	
	Female	**Male**
Overall Workforce	44.7%	55.3%
Tech	24.0%	76.0%
Non-Tech	56.2%	43.8%
Leadership	41.9%	58.1%

Benefits of workforce diversity

Diversity has the power to grow a business in many ways. The global village that we now operate in, offers a chance to tap into other boundaries that were otherwise not known to be possible. For example, an organisation can attract employees from other countries by setting up a business there. Before it would have been hard to set a new business in Uganda for example because of issues such as language differences. Now that you have the chance, why not diversify?

There are many benefits of organisational diversity and according to Sakalova (2015), here are some of them:

- **Promotes individuality within an organisation** – Through acknowledging that every person can contribute with different, creative and new ideas and solutions. Employees with different backgrounds and experiences can bring together a variety of perspectives on matters and thus increase productivity and deliver better results**.** Diversity brings in diverse different talents together working towards a common goal using different sets of skills that increase their retention and productivity.
- **Building a stronger brand** - It makes the company more interesting and desirable employer. With a diversified workforce, an organisation gains even a good reputation and image because it is seen as having fair employment practices.
- Workplace diversity **increases creativity and problem-solving.** Having a variety of different people from various backgrounds together is essential for finding and implementing creative solutions to business problems. With a diverse mindset coming together many more solutions will arise as every individual brings in their way of thinking, operating and solving problems and decision making.
- **Attract and retain talent -** Young and as well as experienced professionals and thus add a competitive edge to the organisation. Possessing a different set of skills and having a good command of different and/or exotic languages and being appreciated for that increases the feeling of belonging. This enables the company to compete in the international market or to increase its diverse customer base and market share.
- **Optimise an organisation's ability to meet the needs of each different market** - Representatives of specific country or demographics can be paired with clients of the similar backgrounds, helping clients feel more comfortable and in a way to create customer loyalty to the company. For example, having an employee who is part of a specific culture or a region where a given business is conducted is a great advantage for the organisation.

… But does diversity automatically mean inclusion?

When thinking about diversity, it may be easy to confuse the term with inclusion. This is not bad if you did not know because many people tend to confuse these. Now that you know, you will need to be aware of how you speak of the two concepts.

- Workable Technology (2021) provides a simple definition for both diversity and inclusion.
- Diversity – "Diversity in the workplace describes the variation in personal, physical, and social characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, age, and education."
- Inclusion – "Inclusion refers to the procedures organisations implement to integrate everyone in the workplace, allowing their differences to coexist in a mutually beneficial way. The goal of inclusion strategies is to make everyone feel accepted and comfortable, ready to share their opinions and thoughts without hesitation."

Upon reading these definitions, one can see that although these two concepts are not the same, they work hand in hand. Diversity is a step in the direction of inclusion. Diversity can take place without inclusion but you need diversity to achieve inclusion.

Take, for example, a predominantly "white school" that has taken the step to allow "black" students to

enrol. At face value, this looks like a good initiative and some may turn away thinking that all the work is done. If two or three "black" students become a part of the student body but the teaching system does not accommodate their differences or other "white" students ill-treat them as a result of a lack of inclusion efforts and education, then this becomes a problem. Ultimately, the school would have failed and possibly done more harm than good to the minority group.

Workforce diversity training

When change is about to take place where does it usually begin? At the top. As a leader of an organisation making efforts to effectively move to a more diverse and inclusive environment, there are some questions you need to ask yourself. Change is not easy for anyone but it is necessary. In this case, more people are offered the opportunity than they ever were before. Ignoring this will only put harm to the surrounding social environment.

Below are some questions provided by PWC (2020) on how to get everyone on board:

- Am I getting leaders the right information on D&I data and programming (e.g. demographic data, retention, updates on D&I programmes and goals)?
- Have I adequately listened to a range of employee perspectives to inform my D&I roadmap?
- Is there a compelling narrative around my organisation's D&I story?
- Has D&I been integrated into all aspects of my organisation (e.g. hiring, performance and development, and supply chain)?
- During reorganisation or restructuring, does my organisation go beyond looking for possible adverse impacts to consider the potential future impacts on diversity?

Thandeka Madziwanyika is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/481950

Cell number +263 78 318 0936

Email: thandeka@ipcconsultants.com

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