

Workforce Diversity and Organizational Performance- A Review

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ABSTRACT

Workforce diversity can be defined as a broad mix of people from different backgrounds, cultures etc working together in the same organisation. Diversity provides both challenges and opportunities for the organisations. The different dimensions of diversity may have different effects and outcomes within the organisation, and thus the effect of one dimension cannot be generalized for all the others. The purpose of this paper is to review the various studies pertaining to the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational/employee performance. Different empirical papers were reviewed which were selected keeping in view the different criteria laid down by the researcher. The study has adopted review methodology by conducting a literature search concerning between workforce diversity and organizational/ employee performance for the period 1990-2014. The results presented in this paper show an evidence of empirical relationship among organizational performance and has been found to be contradictory, giving mixed results.

Keywords: Employee Performance, Organizational Performance, Workforce Diversity, Gender, Age, Cultural Diversity

I. INTRODUCTION

Diversity is defined as the distinctions that exist between the members of the same entity [1]. Workforce diversity can be defined as a broad mix of people from different backgrounds, cultures etc working together in the same organisation. It mainly includes those differences which can affect the performance of the workforce in an organisation. Workplaces are becoming more and more heterogeneous day by day and this heterogeneity has forced people to come together and work for the same goal. Organisations are now recognizing the need to have a diverse employee base in various ways which includes age, disability status, sexual orientation etc [2]. Diversity provides both challenges and opportunities for the organisations. Diversity involves not just how people recognize themselves but also how they recognize others [3]. Workforce diversity is not only about the demographic differences like caste, race, gender, age etc but also includes individual differences and similarities that make them different or similar to each other [4]. It involves understanding each other and embracing each difference among the individuals within an organisation [5].

If an organisation is able to show same performance, profits and quality, with a diverse workforce as with a homogenous workforce without any changes in standards, or compromising competence then that organisation will be able to increase competition in the marketplace [6]. The different dimensions of diversity may have different effects and outcomes within the organisation, and thus the effect of one dimension cannot be generalized for all the others [7]. As mentioned earlier, Harrison & Klein, 2007 described the three categories of employee diversity which include variety, separation and disparity [8]. Variety affects the outcomes of an organisation positively because it provides a huge base of informational resources, which helps in better decision making. While as separation affects the outcomes negatively as it divides employees on basis of dissimilarities which results in decreased creativity and increased intergroup competition. Disparity also affects the organisational outcomes negatively because of inequality in the assets like status or salary etc., it results in lesser cooperation among the employees. An organisation which has a diverse workforce at all its levels is able to adapt in the changing business condition more efficiently [9]. The presence of diversity in the top management also affects the performance, having a diverse top management significantly influences the financial performance of the organisations [10]. Some studies reveal that top management team diversity has a positive effect on the firm performance [11] while some other studies show no impact at all (Marimuthu & Kolandaisamy, 2009).

II. OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this paper is to study workforce diversity and organizational performance, to take an outline of all the essential information related to these variables and to extensively review the relationship among them.

III. METHOD

Many different databases like science direct, proquest, j-gate, jstor, springer link, wiley online library etc. were used to identify various research articles related to the performance and workforce diversity. As the paper tried to examine the relationship between performance and diversity, the keyword combination of these two words was used to gain access to various related articles. Other than these, the keywords like Employee Performance, Organizational Performance, Workforce Diversity, Gender, Age, Cultural Diversity were also used. The articles published between 1990 and 2014 on the relationship of the mentioned variables were focused on.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workforce diversity is generally believed to have a positive effect on the performance of the organisations. Diversity enhances creativity and improves the effectiveness of decision making thus improving the performance of the firm [7]. There have been various studies internationally which have tried to establish the type of relationship between the two. International firms have not only had multiculturalism but also multinationalism which adds to their already diverse employee base. The productivity of such international firms is affected due to this diversity. Geringer et al. (1989) suggested that there is a positive affinity between the firm performance and international diversification [13]. Diversity brings forward numerous ideas to solve problems and formulate strategies [14]. Different people come with different perspectives and provide a wide range of options to tackle obstacles. Having a diverse workforce and managing it properly is an important part as the results yielded that, from having a diverse workforce depends on its management. Diversity management can help create a sense of belongingness among the employees irrespective of their backgrounds by working hard and thus improving their performance and increasing the firm's profit. It enhances innovation and productivity and creates a culture that helps in outperforming the competition [15]. A formulated and designed HR strategy values workforce diversity to enhance employee motivation and morale which results in improving the performance and retention of employees [16]. The diversity can be a positive feature of an organisation but the extent to which an organisation is diverse has also been seen to have different effects. If the diversity exists beyond an optimum level it can lead to a negative influence on the outcomes of an organisation. It has been found that there is a curvilinear relationship between international diversity and the performance outcomes of the firm [13], which means if diversity exceeds a particular level, it results in negative consequences.

A study by Luis R. Gomez-Mejia and Leslie E. Palich (1997) examined the relationship between the cultural diversity of firms and their performance. The study tried to find whether the culturally related international diversity of firms is positively associated with its performance and the firms which have culturally unrelated international diversity have a negative effect on their performance. The study was done on Fortune 500 firms over a period of 10 years (1985-1994), to predict performance for culturally diverse firms while controlling certain organisational and industry characteristics. The results revealed that cultural diversity has no significant effect on the firm's performance [17]. Another study by Desere Kolt (2003) aimed at examining the impact of cultural diversity on team performance. The study was conducted on the operational level work teams of security sector of South Africa. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the required data. The sample size for the study was 110. The results did not indicate the cultural issues to be a major problem. It failed to reveal the existence of diversity issues. The results mostly focused on the role of team leaders, which is crucial and the team leaders need to be given leadership and diversity training in order to manage diverse teams [18].

Another study by Robin J. Ely (2004), examined the impact of four dimensions of diversity, age, tenure, gender and race on the performance of the employees. The study was conducted on 486 retail bank branches in the northeastern United States. The study used an employee attitude-satisfaction survey and archival data to analyze the demographic distribution of the branches; it also assessed the bonus incentive plan of the branch to analyze the performance. The results revealed that performance was not affected by race and gender diversity. And tenure and age diversity moderately affects the performance [19]. While a study by Karen A. Jehn and Katerina Bezrukova (2004) revealed that Gender diversity had a negative effect on individual and group performance but had a positive effect on the composite bonus measure. Tenure diversity had a positive on all the three outcomes i.e. individual performance, group performance and the bonus outcomes. Diversity in the functional background is positively associated to individual and group performance and negatively related to bonus outcomes and lastly, the diversity in the level of education is negatively associated with the individual and group performance [20].

For establishing a relationship between diverse groups and performance results are again found to be inconclusive. In certain cases, it has been found that the members of the different groups with limited skills perform better than the members

of the same group with high abilities. Initially, a heterogeneous group might be less effective in terms of performance due to communication problems but later they are found to be better performers than the groups with a homogenous composition [21]. A review on diversity by Milliken and Martins (1996), reveal that groups that are diverse have a higher turnover but lower member satisfaction [22]. Another review by Maznevski (1994) revealed that the integration of diversity is the most common aspect of high performing diverse groups [23]. Diverse groups not only perform better but are also able to take better decisions [24].

There is a lot of diversity in markets as well thus it has become important to have a diverse workforce particularly in service-providing industries [25]. They will be able to cater the needs of diverse consumers in an efficient way. Having a diverse employee base makes it easier to sell products [26]. If an organisation is diverse it becomes more favourable to different customers, even for direct sales people will prefer a representative they can relate to. Different racial minorities will more preferably purchase from organisations which have a positive diversity image. The interaction between the employees and the customers is important in organisations especially in service industries thus having a diverse base of employees can be a bonus. A study by Herring, 2009 on the data of National Organisations Survey from 1996 to 1997 done in the US related to workforce diversity revealed that racial diversity increases sales, more customers, increased profits and a greater market share and gender diversity was found to be associated with an increase in sales, customers and profit [27].

Women now constitute a good proportion of the workforce worldwide. It has been found that gender diversity has a positive impact on the value of an organisation [28]. A study Julizaerma and Sori (2012) also reveal a positive relationship between woman present on the board of an organisation and the firm performance [29]. Gender diversity has been found to have a positive influence on the performance of firms [27]. A review of nine diversity studies by Syvanteck and Bott (2004), published from 1989-2003 studied the relationship between gender diversity and performance, among the nine studies, four studies no effects, two studies showed positive and two showed negative effects and one study revealed a nonlinear effect [30].

Many researchers also suggest that cultural diversity leads to increased performance and sustainable competitive advantage [31]. The attributes of functional diversity like age, tenure etc. have a positive influence on the firm performance as well as innovation [32]. Due to which many of the today's organisations are focusing on having a balance of racial, ethnic and gender workforce not only because of the ethical or legal reasons but also because of the economic outputs [33].

A study conducted by Debra L. Griest in 1995 evaluates the process and performance of diverse teams. This study tried to individually assess whether groups with more gender diversity, age diversity, ethnic diversity, diverse in terms of personality and those which are overall diverse are more effective in accomplishing creative tasks. The study also tried to find out whether highly effective diverse groups have high-quality group dynamics and the level of effectiveness achieved by the diverse groups is related to the values emphasized by that group. The study was conducted on seven process improvement teams of a government research and development organisation located in the Midwestern United States. The results revealed that groups with more gender diversity, age diversity and ethnic diversity are no more effective than homogenous groups. The groups that were more diverse in personality were less effective in accomplishing creative tasks. It was also found that groups with more diversity in terms of socio-economic background were more effective and those with position diversity were less effective. Groups that show overall diversity have a higher group dynamics quality. Groups that have an overall diversity are more effective than those groups which are homogenous. It was also found that the diversity, group values and effectiveness were related. Group values were common in teams with higher diversity. The results concluded that the organisations can effectively utilize diverse groups if consciously increase diversity among groups and maintain the level of communication, ensure that group members have a proper understanding of expectations [34].

A study on board member diversity to performance by Julie I. Siciliano in 1996 was conducted on the data from 240 YMCA organisations to establish a relationship between diversity and organisational performance. The Organisational performance was measured on the basis of social performance, fiscal performance, fundraising and donations. Results show that higher the occupational diversity higher is the social performance and fundraising results. Gender diversity was favourably associated with the social performance but had a negative impact on fundraising. Age diversity was associated with higher levels of donations [35]. Another study by Maran marimuthu, Indraah Kolandaisamy in 2009 tried to analyze the effect of ethnic and gender diversity in the top management teams on the financial performance of select companies in Malaysia. The study used secondary data and the results revealed that there is no effect of gender and ethnic diversity among top management on the financial performance of the companies [36]. Emma Garcia-Meca, Isabel-Maria Garcia-Sanchez, Jennifer Martinez-Ferrero in 2014 studied the effect of diversity of gender and nationality of boards in banks on the performance. A sample of 159 banks from 9 countries was used during a period of 2004-2010. Results reveal that gender diversity increases the performance while nationality diversity hinders it. While considering the effects of investor protection and bank regulatory it was found that while there is weaker regulatory and lower investor protection, the diversity of board has no influence on the performance of banks [37]. Daniel C.M. Low, Helen Roberts, Rosalind H. Whiting in 2015 conducted a study on four Asian countries reveals that the increasing number of women participation in boards of firms has the positive effect on performance but the firms with higher female participation show decrease in that positive effect [38].

A study by Linda Barrington, Kenneth Troske in 2001 tries to establish the relationship between the economic performance of an organisation and the workforce diversity through empirically assessing New Worker-Establishment Characteristics Database (NWECD) which is an employee-employer matched data set. The findings suggest that diversity has either positive or no effect on the performance [39].

An empirical assessment on how employee diversity affects the performance of the organisation due to discrimination and the type of relations among the employees in the work group was done by Jonathan S. Leonard and David I. Levine in 2003. The study examined 800 workspaces, which included 70000 of a service sector company in the United States. The study combined the demographics at employee level to the 1990 census on community characteristics, the employee data consisted of the employee records from 1996 to 1998. It was found that racial and gender diversity is generally not related to sales. The average age i.e. 24yrs of the population has shown slightly higher sales. It was also found that the increasing age diversity has negative impact on sales within the store and also between stores and effect of racial diversity was found to be small, negative and statistically insignificant within the stores. The results also reveal that the employee-customer match does not affect the sales [40].

A study on perceived diversity and organisational performance by Richard S. Allen Gail Dawson Kathleen Wheatley Charles S. White in 2007 was conducted on 391 managers from 130 different firms in the US. The results reveal that there is a positive relationship between employee perceptions of diversity and perceptions of organisational performance [41]. Another study in 2007 by Orlando C. Richard, B. P. S. Murthi and Kiran Ismail on the impact of racial diversity on performance was conducted on 1200 US firms using their cross-sectional and pooled time series data to demonstrate the long term and short term effects of racial diversity on financial performance. The results revealed that race has no particular impact on performance [42].

In 2011, Fidan Ana Kurtulus performed a study on a US firm. The empirical analysis was done using personal data of employees and the ratings of their supervisors. The study examined the effects of diversity of age, gender, race, tenure, education, performance, work function, division tenure and wages of the employees who work in the same division. Results revealed that age, performance dissimilarity and firm tenure are associated with lower work performance whereas wage dissimilarity is linked with higher work performance. Results also showed that some differences get smaller in magnitude with time. Also, the paper revealed that the relationship between performance and various diversity dimensions vary with respect to division size and occupational area [43].

Mercy Gacheri Munjuri and Rachael Muthoni Maina in 2013, examined the relationship between employee performance and workforce diversity. The study was conducted on the banking sector in Kenya using a descriptive research design. The study comprised of 54 respondents which included senior managers, line managers and non-managerial employees. The sample was chosen through stratified random sampling from 3 branches of the bank. The study also accessed the strategies in place to manage the workforce. The study revealed that the Bank had strategies such as support to minority groups, balanced recruitment, diversity training and equal employment opportunities. The compensation was determined by the level of education and the ability to perform and no other diversity variable was used to determine the employee's compensation. The study also revealed that diversity does affect the performance of employees whether managerial or non managerial. It was seen that there is a significant level of association between performance of employees and productivity levels of the bank employees when distinguished by gender, age and level of education [44].

In 2014, Nailah Ayub Karen Jehn performed a study to establish a relationship between the role of national diversity and attitudes on conflict and performance. This cross-cultural comparative study was done on two samples which involved 122 participants from Pakistan & 117 from The Netherlands. The results suggest that differences in attitudes and beliefs among different nationalities is negatively related to performance and positively related to conflict while as more the differences in nationalities resulted in less conflict and higher performance [45].

Ogbo, Ann I, Kifordu Anyibuofu Anthony and Wilfred I. Ukpere in 2014 conducted a study on the effects of workforce diversity on the performance of three brewing firms in Nigeria. With the sample size of 300, they tried to determine whether diversity has a positive effect on performance and if education can help in managing it. The authors also tried to find out the effects of diversity on the profitability index of the Nigerian firms and how these firms are managing diversity. The study was done through secondary data and oral interview and content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that the diversity has a positive effect on customer related issues, performance and organisational profitability and education can be used as a tool to help manage diversity. Thus workforce diversity has been found to be a tool to improve organisational performance and productivity [46].

Although there have been studies which show the positive side of diversity and there are many studies which reveal that diversity has a lot many negative consequences or no consequences at all as well in terms of performance. It can create organisational conflicts thus affecting the organisations productivity. On one hand, diversity helps to improve creativity, innovation and problem-solving but on the other hand it can lead to an increase in conflicts and a decrease in group cohesiveness and performance [47]. Sometimes diversity can neither help in better performance nor hinder it, depending upon the strategies, culture and the practices of the organisation [48]. Richard et al, 2003 found, when innovation was a part of the organisational strategy, the performance was improved through racial diversity but when innovation was decreased, racial diversity hindered the performance [49]. It has also been found that the groups which are different from their group

leader based on any dimension of diversity, their performance evaluations show lower performance [50]. A number of research studies revealed that having diverse groups in the organisations result in many negative outcomes like conflict, stereotyping and turnover thus affecting the performance of the organisation [14]. Thomas and Ely (1996) suggest that increasing diversity and demographic differences in the workforce of an organisation do not increase the organisational performance [51]. A review of the literature by Milliken and Martins (1996) revealed that diversity of gender and race can in certain cases have negative impacts on the group as well as individual outcomes like minorities groups have a lower commitment, higher turnover intentions and absenteeism as compared to the majority groups [52].

CONCLUSION

In the present scenario of the Indian organisations diversity of the workforce is an aspect which can neither be avoided nor underestimated. It holds an important place as it is growing each and every day whether it is in terms of gender, age, religion or any other dimension. The literature implies that some dimensions have positive effects while others may have negative effects and these effects vary with the type of industries and organisations and they also vary as per the location of those particular industries and organisations. All the results presented so far in the literature have been found to be contradictory, giving mixed results. There are limited samples and the shortage of empirical evidence which link performance and diversity [53]. The results of empirical evidence related to the performance outcomes of diversity are inconsistent. Thus in order to reach a generalization there is a need of repeating and replicating in same and different areas and as well as same and different organizations.

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