

# CHALLENGES OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS DUE TO WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Human Resource Management is a process which deals with managing the people to achieve organizational goals. To achieve the goals of the Organisation, Human Resource Managers must understand the current trends in their field. One of the important trends to manage in this globalized environment is workforce diversity. People differ in many ways such as personality, background, beliefs and values. Such differences may have both positive and negative impact on an organization. This study was conducted with Human Resource Personnel from various industries to find out the challenges they face in managing a diverse workforce. Some of the findings reveal the following: it is time-consuming to communicate the same information in two or three languages to employees who speak different languages; it is not an easy task to tackle problems of a diverse workforce; there is always delay in the completion of work given to a group of employees from different backgrounds.

**Key-Words:** Diversity, Workforce Diversity, Human Resource Managers, Different Backgrounds, Management of workforce

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management is a process which deals with managing people to achieve organizational goals. The world is rapidly changing in terms of business. Therefore HR managers must understand the effects of the current trends in their field which have financial implications for their organization. Some of the current trends in Human Resource Management include: workforce diversity, globalization, business process re-engineering and corporate downsizing. This study was conducted on workforce diversity since it is one of the challenging areas in human resource management today.

People differ in different ways such as personality, background, beliefs and values. In any work environment such differences may include age, gender, race, religion, educational background, language, family status, work style, work experience and geographical location, just to mention a few. Such differences may have both positive and negative impact on an organization. Therefore, human resource managers must give particular consideration to the diversity of their workforce while planning their management process.

The concept of diversity focuses much on understanding each other's differences and on how people perceive themselves as well as others. Diversity makes the work-force heterogeneous. If it is managed properly, it can increase creativity and if not managed properly, it can lead to conflicts among employees and can negatively affect productivity.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

India is one of the countries across the globe with more diverse workforce. **Meena (2015)**, in his article, categorized Indian diversity into two: socio-cultural and demographic. He pointed out that the socio-cultural dimensions consist of caste, religion and language, whereas the demographic dimensions include age, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability and region of origin

**Salex A. (2014)** describes workforce diversity as "similarities and differences among employees in such elements like age, gender, religion, cultural background, race, physical abilities and disabilities and sexual orientation".

**Jha, A. (2009)** recognizes diverse workforce as the most important asset of the organization. He points out that a diverse workforce is good at problem solving because members provide different and creative ideas and give competitive advantage to the organization. He also adds that proper understanding of the expectations of each individual will make the diversified workforce happy.

Ankita Saxena cited **Saha, A. (2007)** emphasizes that there is a need to employ diversified workforce even though the employees find it difficult to adapt the culture of the organization and to adjust to the environment. It is, therefore, the

duty of the managers to provide trainings and sessions where employees can interact with each other and learn about the rituals, dressings, mannerisms and food habits of different people.

**Devoe (1999)** points out that “managers may be challenged with losses in personnel and work productivity due to prejudice and discrimination, as well as complaints and legal actions against the organization”. Therefore, managers need to put in place strategies to manage diversity in order to avoid employee turnover.

### 3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As most of the industries are becoming more diverse, managers may face a lot of challenges in creating and maintaining a positive work-environment where people respect each other’s similarities and differences. Hence, the goal of this research was to study the challenges that HR Managers face in managing a diverse workforce.

### 4. MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Aim

To study the Challenges faced by Human Resource Managers due to Workforce Diversity.

#### 4.2 Objectives

1. To find out the demographic details of the workforce.
2. To explore the benefits of employing a diverse workforce.
3. To find out the nature of conflicts arising out of workforce diversity.
4. To find out the challenges faced by Human Resource Managers in dealing with a diverse workforce.
5. To find out the policies that various industries employ in managing workforce diversity.

#### 4.3 Research Design

The descriptive research design was employed to obtain the statistical data on the existing challenges faced by Human Resource Managers in managing workforce of different backgrounds. This approach involves objective data-gathering to arrive at findings that are systematic, generalisable and open to replication by other investigators.

#### 4.4 Sample Size

The questionnaire was sent to various HR Managers in different industries, among whom those who responded were 41. Hence the sample size was 41. The Human Resource Personnel hailed from various industries in Ambur, Bangalore, Chennai, Hosur and Kerala.

#### 4.5 Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured questionnaire which was developed through Google forms was used to collect data and the HTML link was sent to HR Managers through various WhatsApp groups, portals and emails.

#### 4.6 Data Analysis

The collected data was processed and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the results are presented below in tables and diagrams.

#### Statistical Output

**Table 1-Demographic Details of Workforce**

Gender	More Male	61%	Work Experience	Less than 5 years	48.8%
	More Female	17%		5 to 10 years	43.9%
	Equal	22%		More than 10 years	7.3%
Geographical area	Rural	2.4%	Religion	Hinduism	41.2%
	Urban	17.1%		Muslim	23.5%

	Both	80.5%		Christianity	35.3%
Type of Family	Nuclear	92.7%	Workforce from other states		80.5%
	Joint	7.3%	Workforce from other countries		29.3%

The Table above shows that most of the companies employ more male (61%) employees. Majority (80.5%) of companies employ people from both rural and urban areas. Majority (92.7%) of the workforce comes from nuclear families. Most of the companies have workforce with less than five years (48.8%) work experience. Most of the companies have workforce from Hinduism (41.2%). Majority of the companies stated that they employ people from other States and 29.3% of the companies mention that they have workforce from other countries.

**Table 2- Challenges of Employing a Diverse Workforce**

Challenges of Employing a Diverse Workforce	Frequency (N=41)	Percentage (%)
Time Consuming	33	14.7%
Changing Perception of Employees	25	11.1%
Changing Attitude of Employees	21	9.3%
Tackling Problems of Employees	39	17.3%
Discrimination among Employees	22	9.8%
Those with more work Experience not willing to work with others	22	9.8%
Bias in Solving Conflicts	24	10.7%
Delay in Completion of Work	39	17.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

From the Table presented, it can be inferred that the total responses for the challenges of employing a diverse workforce is 225, out of which 17.3% mentioned that there is delay in the completion of work when given to employees from different backgrounds and that they face the challenge of tackling problems among diverse employees. A little more than one tenth (14.7%) pointed out that it is time-consuming to communicate the same information in different languages. A little more than one tenth (11.1%) of the respondents said that they face the challenge to change the perception of employees towards diversity. One tenth (10.7%) pointed out that there is bias in solving the conflicts between employees from different backgrounds. 9.8% of the respondents noted that there is discrimination and unwillingness on the part of employees with more work experience to work with those with less work experiences. A little less than one tenth (9.3%) of the respondents said that they face challenges in changing the attitude of employees when they are working together with fellow employees from other backgrounds.

**Table 3- Chi Square Test**

Extent of Diversity	Computed Overall Challenges of Employing a Diverse Workforce		Total
	Low	High	
More Diverse	4 (26.7%) 25.0%	11 (73.3%) 44.0%	15 (100.0%) 36.6%
Diverse	7 (50.0%) 43.8%	7 (50.0%) 28.0%	14 (100.0%) 34.1%
Less Diverse	5 (41.7%) 31.2%	7 (58.3%) 28.0%	12 (100.0%) 29.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16 (39.0%)</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>25 (61.9%)</b> <b>100.0%</b>	<b>41 (100.0%)</b> <b>100.0%</b>

The above Table portrays that a little less than three fourth (73.3%) of the respondents, who mentioned their companies to have a greatly diverse workforce, speak of having a high level of challenges due to employing a diverse workforce. Out of the respondents who said their company has a diverse workforce, half (50%) showed to have a low level and the other half (50%) showed to have a high level of challenges due to employing a diverse workforce. More than half (58.3%) of the respondents who mentioned their companies to be less diverse, denoted high level of challenges due to the diverse workforce.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant association between the extent of diversity and the overall challenges due to employing a diverse workforce.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant association between the extent of diversity and the overall challenges due to employing a diverse workforce.

Pearson Chi-Square Value : 1.707

Degree of Freedom (df) : 2

Level of Significance : .426

From the analysis it can be inferred that the significant value .426 is greater than 0.05. Therefore there is no significant association between the extent of diversity and the overall challenges of employing a diverse workforce. Hence, the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is accepted.

## 5. MAIN FINDINGS

### 5.1 Demographic Details of the Workforce

The findings show that the companies under this study vary in terms of the extent of diversity from more diverse to less diverse. The study reveals that all the respondents mentioned to have workforce of different age and gender in their company. Most of the companies are dominated by male employees than female employees. The companies are composed of workforce from both rural and urban areas.

Majority of the workforce in the companies under this study come from nuclear families. The findings also show that companies employ workforce of varied work-experience from the range of less than five years to more than ten years. The companies also employ workforce from different religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The study reveals that some companies employ people from other States and other countries.

### 5.2 The Benefits of Employing a Diverse Workforce

According to **Dike (2013)**, employing a diverse workforce benefits includes increase of productivity, encouragement for the exchange of ideas and team work, promotion of learning and growth of employees, enhancement of effective communication and the promotion of diverse experiences. This study reveals that more than half (52.9%) of male respondents denoted low level on these benefits and a little less than three fourth (71.4%) of female respondents showed low level on the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. This implies that both male and female HR Personnel have not experienced many benefits from having a diverse workforce in their company.

### 5.3 The Dimension of Workforce Diversity which Causes Conflicts

The findings show that all the dimensions of diversity which include age, gender, language, work experience, religion and geographical area, cause conflict in a workplace. The study also reveals that two third (66.7%) of the respondents in manufacturing companies and textile industry showed high level of conflict due to the dimensions of diversity. It is also understood that three fourth (75%) of the respondents in service industry denoted low level of conflicts due to the dimension of diversity. All the respondents (100%) in IT industry showed to have low level of conflicts due to the dimension of diversity.

## 6. CHALLENGES OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS

The HR Personnel from various companies disclosed that it is time-consuming to communicate the same information in different languages to employees who speak different languages, and that it is not easy to change the attitude and perception of employees towards a fellow employee from a different background. They also mentioned that

tackling problems of employees poses a challenge to HR Personnel since each group has its own issues: the discrimination which happens among employees from different backgrounds causes challenges to HR Personnel to manage them. Those people with more work experience are not willing to work with others with less work experience; hence, when giving group work, their differences need to be taken into consideration since it delays completion of work. Another challenge faced by HR Managers in managing a diverse workforce is bias in solving conflicts which creates division between the Management and employees, and among the employees themselves.

## 7. THE POLICIES USED IN MANAGING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

This study reveals that more than two thirds (68.3%) of the respondents indicated that their company has a diversity policy. A little less than one third (31.7%) mentioned that they did not have a diversity policy in their company. It is evident that companies differ in terms of the dimensions of diversity which the policy addresses, since majority (93.3%) of the companies which are more diverse showed to have low level of dimensions of diversity which the policy addresses. A little less than two third (64.3%) of the companies which are less diverse showed to have low level of dimensions of diversity that the policy addresses.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained in this study, it can be concluded that the extent of diversity does not really imply the level of challenges the Human Resource Managers may face when managing a diverse workforce since both companies which are more diverse and those which are less diverse experience more challenges having employees from different backgrounds. Hence there is no significant relationship between the extent of diversity and the overall challenges that HR Managers face due to workforce diversity.

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