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Myth or Reality: Perception of Frontline Managers about Diversity in Pakistan

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Abstract: Workplace diversity is a broad notion that refers to the individual variances among those who work for a company. Managing diversity in an organization is top management agenda; however, it is ineffectual to get targeted results due to manager's perception and definition towards the concept of diversity. Middle managers are responsible in translation and implementation of diversity programs therefore their perception about diversity effects implementation and outcomes of Diversity management (DM). Pakistan has been identified homogenous and irrelevant to diversity paradigm. Contrary to that, this study has explored the value and perception of managers about diversity, exclusively responsible for implementation of diversity management practices in MNCs. Researchers introduced this area of study raising two overarching challenges: to develop more context-specific definitions of diversity; to focus on belief and value of managers about diversity effectiveness and difference in gender perception of managers; within multinational corporations. Qualitative research method has been used and eight MNCs Managers mainly handling DM functions, involve in implementation have been interviewed. Findings of study have helped to provide context based definition of diversity and difference in gender perception of managers for effectiveness of diversity and its value for company growth. Human resource managers perceive diversity mainly surface level, as gender.

Introduction

The concept of diversity entails dissimilarities and differences exist in a society. Since the beginning of human history, there have been visible differences in gender, age, aptitude, personality and knowledge (Bacouel-Jentjens, & Yang, I. 2019). Diversity research is failed in finding unanimous definitions of diversity that encompass all of the human differences (Yadav, & Lenka, 2020). Indeed, societies develop with such differences and pre-established roles and cultural values that individuals may function effectively in groups. As a result, due to cultural contextualization,

diversity manifests itself differently in each country (White, & Rice, 2015). Thus making differences beneficial for organizational performance becomes challenging when the concept of diversity enters the workplace. Globalization, demand for a diversified workforce and more technology, have made the workplace more competitive than ever (Cook & Glass, 2009).

In fact, if it is not managed effectively, growing diversity at work can be a double-edged sword. However, in the twenty-first

century, a company's viability depends increasingly on diversity and its management (Akobo, & Damish 2018). In similar vein diversity management has gained focus in academics too that improve organizational competitiveness by valuing and respecting human differences and developing them for an inclusive workplace (Aldalbat, et al, 2019). Diversity encourages respect and appreciation of the unique talents and perspectives that each person contributes to the workplace. The phenomena of globalization has accelerated multinational firms and increasing workforce mobility which augmented national diversity as a significant element of the modern workforce (Suharnomo, et al., 2017).

In multinational companies national diversity and its instantaneous local context is vivid challenge for human resource managers (Shen, Tang, & Netto, 2014). There is inadequate academic research to internalize MNCs domestic diversity agendas to retain their national perspective. Hence, the transfer of Diversity management practices (DMP) occurs frequently from developed countries to developing ones (Aycan, 2005). As a result, managing diversity face difficulty due to managers' inability to fully understand the dynamics of today's diverse workforce, prevent their own prejudicial attitudes, and creatively manage the potential benefits of a diverse workforce. This problem does not, however, stem from the diversity of the workforce itself but Effective implementation of DMP is fundamentally dependent on the extent to which the practices are perceived to be appropriate by managers (Cho, Kim & Mor Barak, 2017). There is a misperception that Asian nations are homogeneous and irrelevant to the study of diversity, henceforth little attention has been given to this area. (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008). Similarly only a small number of academics have shown an interest in how managers value diversity (Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2011).

In previous literature, Asian countries are viewed as less significant in terms of managing workplace diversity and ensuring that dissimilarities are successful. MNCs are said to have refined strategies and processes for managing diversity and its usefulness. In case of making diversity valuable supplemented with targeted practices mainly depend on the understanding and perception of managers liable for implementation diversity programs. Likewise, how middle management perceives organizational agenda is heavily involved in implementation and translation, has an impact on the outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to ascertain how managers define diversity to determine whether they agree that it is beneficial to the firm. Similarly host country culture has significance in process of implementation. However, it is impossible to apply imported and foreign policies without taking into account the cultural background of the host nation.

Literature Review

Workplace diversity has gained attention of practitioners significantly as well also in academic research (Bendl, Hainzl & Mensi-Klarbach, 2019). Understanding workplace diversity, recognizing its potential and supporting excluded groups from two tracks of research. The positivist research tradition is upheld by mainstream diversity literature, which conducts quantitative empirical studies and focuses primarily on the performance traits of diverse workforces. Through in-depth research, criticism, and the creation of potential solutions, critical diversity literature seeks to improve social justice. The variances and dissimilarities that divide society into distinct groups, each with their own wants and requirements, are the basis for diversity. With reference to this study Mazibuko and Govender, (2017) gave viewpoints about workplace diversity as work experience, life styles, culture, and religion on the one hand, and ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, education, and religion on the other. The

challenge of adopting diversity in an organization was made more difficult by the literature's lack of clarity on social and functional distinctions, which resulted in the absence of organizational policies differentiating between social and functional groups (Akobo, 2017).

Furthermore, Literature is rife with several diversity types and categories, the most of which are founded on perception and perceiving from dichotomies. The lack of a consistent definition, According to Jonsen et al. (2011) may be caused by the fact that many academics interchangeably use terms like dispersion, heterogeneity, dissimilarity, divergence, and variation. Using both broad and specific category definitions, Mor Barak, et al (2016) in review explored typologies of diversity definitions in which few people fall into the categories of immediately observable, less easily observable, surface level, deep level, strongly job-related, less strongly job-related and role-related inherit-dimensions. While this study is seeking a comprehensive definition of differences in national context of Pakistan for managing them with positive outcomes. The conceptualization of diversity and its inclusion is not possible without considering given national context in MNCs (Farndale et al., 2015).

Likewise, the way diversity efforts are carried out determines their success. The process of translating organizational diversity policies and programs into practice depends heavily on managers' goals and perspectives. Davis, Frolova and Callahan, (2016) revealed that work place diversity is not well understood and valued particularly among managers. Numerous studies have also looked into the function of diversity practitioners in order to understand the inconsistent outcomes of diversity management (Mustafa & Maliqi, 2020). Although some studies have shown that diversity managers have a promising impact on promoting organizational diversity (Castilla, 2008; Dobbin, Schrage & Kaley, 2015;

Hirsh & Kmec, 2009; Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006; Tatli, 2011).

Unfortunately, there isn't just one way to succeed, as managers should understand the dynamics of the workplace and teamwork that matter most for an organization's success (Kelli, Tavast & Pisuke, 2012). In the same way gender of the manager entail two different possible understanding of phenomena of diversity. In general, women are more supportive in valuing the diversity and its effectiveness than males. More women are interested in hiring, managing, and ensuring that there are more employment possibilities for women (Nielsen, et al 2017). According to Mousa, (2021) study, women are more likely than men to view diversity important.

The clear variations in perspectives between male and female managers for recruitment were emphasized by Reddy and Jadhay, (2019) that Male managers hinder the value of gender diversity since, in contrast to female managers; they were not in favor of bringing in and retaining more women. Similarly Dass, and Parker, (2017) highlighted the gender differences in response to equal employment opportunities, found male employees negative response as compare to female employees support equal employment opportunities for growth. The contemporary study aimed to cater research gap relevant to country culture in term of finding a context base diversity definition from local managers working in MNCs. Findings of research are going to add in growing body of knowledge in diversity research which is evidently considered irrelevant to this regional context. Likewise addressing the literature gaps are scientific evidence of existing diversity, specificity and effectiveness for Pakistan's public and private sector organizations.

Method and Procedure

This study adopted qualitative method for in-depth exploration of the manager perception

about diversity and its value for organizational growth. This research is mainly inquisitive in context based findings as in qualitative studies, the context of study is central point that gives meaning to perceptions, choices and experiences of social actors (Poth, 2018). In this study Multinational companies are the social context of this study and considered such organizations which have more comprehensive and advanced organizational policies especially for diversity management. In this regard, researchers collected the detail of register multinational companies from security exchange Pakistan. Researchers selected the eight multinational companies purposefully from available list of organization and the data was collected from purposefully recruited four male and four female human resource managers of these multinational companies as study participants. These participants recruited, because they were responsible for implementing the human resource policies and concept of diversity in organizations. In this study, researchers collected data from those human resources managers who have at least five to ten years of working experience and belong to the age group of 30–45. The data was collected through in-depth interviews and researchers used interview guide for the purpose of data collection, and thematic analysis technique was employed for analysis of collected data.

Analysis and Discussion

Study intended to get underpinning meaning of diversity and its outcome for company growth. This study also anticipated to determine how manager's demographic differences, such as age, gender, job experience, and qualification, affected their perception of diversity management in organization. Eight managers were interviewed for the study, ideally with at least four female participants, in order to get a potential opposing viewpoint on diversity and gender perception differences. The study participants were specialized in the field of

human resource management. Except a female human resource manager, all the human resource managers had 6 to 18 years of human resource manager working experience. Moreover, only a female participant was under the age of 30, whereas, the remaining human resource managers were from the age group of 35 to 50.

Manager's Perception about Diversity

In interview, participants were asked to define how they perceived the concept of diversity. Based on their knowledge and experience, many managers characterized diversity as a difference based on factors such as gender, religion, language, culture, and disability. A few managers identified understanding of deep level diversity that denotes social class, knowledge, personality, and skill differences. However, almost all participants placed a strong emphasis on "gender" as diversity when developing their human resource policy in order to preserve an inclusive and equitable work environment. In a similar vein, it was also mentioned that the organization makes special arrangements for physically challenged people as part of its commitment to diversity. One male manager responded

"Diversity is Gender, color, religion, age and most crucial is the range of skills" (R. 40).

A female respondent countered diversity;

"Diversity is having varied social backgrounds. Diversity includes things like age, ethnicity, and a variety of abilities in addition to gender" (T. 38).

Diversity Effectiveness for Organization

Managers were individually questioned on the value of organizational diversity based on language, religion, age, handicap, personality, and abilities. There was complete consensus among managers about the diversity effectiveness. They also emphasized that as long as diversity is managed properly at work, its effectiveness is unquestionable. Two managers positioned managing diversity as corporate social policy (CSR), which is business policy support for

ethically sound governance. A male respondent specified;

"Diversity is really beneficial because inclusiveness is a crucial component of our organization. Our organization places a strong emphasis on diversity in the workplace because we believe that a more ethnically and culturally diverse management team produces better business outcomes" (A. 42)

A female respondent stated this;

"Diversity brings range of ideas. Gender representation in organization can better highlight their professional objectives and needs because men and women both have various competitive advantages and bring diverse perspectives to the table" (S. 52).

English language is indeed medium of business communication in MNCs, but it become tricky for those work in KPK (Quetta) etc. Some companies have bridged that gap with the assistance of local language experts.

"Yes, there are people here who speak several languages. Not only Punjabis, but Sindhi and Urdu speakers as well, work under my supervision. I never experienced any problems when there was a language issue. Whatever they speak are free to talk" (R. 40).

Hence gender has been highlighted as an advantageous sector of the workforce and Women are considered more studious, creative, and disciplined workers than men. One male manager emphasized the employment of women as they make 49% of our entire population. One male participant restricted women's recruitment to desk jobs, while another male participant passionately advocated for women engrossment in organizations because it brings civility and gentleness. Otherwise, all managers had unanimous opinion upon to be qualified and competent regardless of gender. With reference to Pakistan's patriarchal society, a female manager explained gender diversity:

"The percentage of women in our company's board of directors and in other positions is 40%. When

businesses include diverse representation in their policies and execution, then an organizational culture emerges that fights against patriarchy" (K. 47).

In response to similar query, a male human resource manager explained that;

"Women receive greater attention for representation as compared to the general population as they make up more than half of the population. We don't have a women's quota policy, but our business has a very strict diversity and inclusion programme that actively hires women" (A. 53).

Age is as a significant part of diversity. MNCs operate in highly competitive markets, thus they seek out young, perceptive employees who can easily align with corporate strategy. Additionally, businesses need to make strategic plans and decisions that are heavily reliant on experience; as a result, businesses manage the needs of different generations through their HRM (Human resource management) procedures. Managers consistently agreed that a mix of age groups fosters a more learning- and knowledge-sharing workplace which necessitates a variety of organizational programs to meet each group's unique needs.

MNCs do not have such a law-abiding policy for physically challenged people but a qualified candidate with a disability is equally eligible for selection. One male manager (K. 54), had a significant preference for employees who are differently enabled since they are more devoted to their jobs and the company. From a female manager's perspective (M. 38), organizational structural support infuse high commitment and performance standards in people with disabilities. In conclusion, practically all participants were firmly convinced that people with disabilities should be part of workforce. A female respondent outlined their organization's disability policy.

"Undoubtedly, my company is addressing it. People with vision impairments have been hired for the telemarketing department. They are telecom

marketing professionals. With the same intent, we want to convey the message that if a person is talented, then regardless of any limitations they may have, they may still work” (T. 38).

Cultural diversity plays important role in global operations, but it also has an impact on local context (Buengeler & Den Hartog, 2015). With reference to Pakistan, unlike race regional difference like Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, and Pashtun contribute to the blending of cultures in MNCs. Managers were agreed upon equal opportunity for cultural variability but in a similar spirit, they talked about how biases and prejudices can occasionally cause issues at work palace. Literature is replete with references to workplace spirituality and organizational commitment. According to the 2017 census in Pakistan 3.5 religious minorities make it religiously homogenous. Similarly every participant agreed upon the importance of religiosity at workplace. MNCs promote interfaith harmony equally celebrate “Holi, charismas, and Eid” by giving out gifts and leaves.

Female respondent comments;

“Our company culture supports interfaith harmony, we observe all religious occasions, including Holi and Christmas. In Ramadan, we avoid discussing religion, even if both Muslims and non-Muslims have access to a mess facility” (T. 38).

A male participant accentuated;

“Religion is not our cup of tea” (A. 42).

Deep level diversity is a highly important factor for an organization to support people with unique talents and expertise for retention and progress. Except one manager others could not recognize this degree of diversity during the interview. A male manager gave the following response;

“Even Organization selects individuals based on various abilities and knowledge but deep level diversity is not focus of organizational diversity practices. However, sexual orientation does exist but is not significant in Pakistani culture” (A. 53)

Gender Perception of Manager

In this study, gender of manager is analyzed that how they differently perceive diversity and its effectiveness. Male managers in patriarchal cultures have been found to be less cooperative because they believe that equal opportunities will undermine their power structure. The effectiveness of diversity management initiatives is further hampered by cultural disparities rooted in Pakistan. One male manager supposed;

“Organizational culture shapes you in such way that the manager's gender makes no difference at all. Then, the leadership accountability provides strong support for organizational policies and their implementation, hence, leadership helps alignment of manager's perspective too in that way” (R. 40).

Female manger reciprocated;

“Yes, a manager's gender can have an impact on their performance as occasionally favoring recruiting and promoting men over women” (M. 38)

Discussion

This study was conducted to shed light on manager's understanding and perception about diversity and its effectiveness for organization. Additionally, how the manager's gender influences their perception about diversity effectiveness. Managers of the MNCs under study were well conversant with the wholesome concept of diversity. However, they were unable to distinguish between surface level diversity, which includes age, gender, handicap, language, and religion, and deep level diversity, which includes personality, skills, and sexual orientation. Asian countries have placed greater emphasis on gender as a whole than western culture typically define diversity in terms of race, minorities, and women.

The findings of responses translated gender as "women" solely instead of its theoretical explanation. These findings are consistent with the study findings of Cletus, et al., (2018); Lambert, et al., (2019), Jonsen et al., (2011);

Harrison and Klein, (2007), and Mor Barak (2005; 2013) uphold that differences in workplace is proportionally influenced by Manager's actual diversity characteristics, even though diversity characteristics differ from one culture to another. In MNCs host country is responsible for all operations and implementations of company policies. However, policy design, assessment, and review are the responsibility of top management, who will also consider manager's feedback. It was evident that business policies were well-established and consistent with local cultural norms. Only one organization, though, has diversity management initiatives that are specifically designed for inclusion. While in other companies the Human resource department envisioned policies in such way for establishment of equality and in discriminated workplace. Hence study findings are consistent with Jones and McEwen, (2000); Ferner, Almond and Colling, (2005); Sippola, and Smale, (2007); and Omoyele, and Olabisi, (2020) support the fact that, even in western nations where diversity is frequently at the top of organizational agendas, it does not operate as a separate section butt HR section is in charge of putting diversity programs into action. On the other hand translation of organizational policies into effective implementation depends heavily on manager perception. In this regard, their age, professional background, and education collectively contribute in forming their perception and professional development.

All employees, especially supervisors, should consider diversity as a key competency Hales, (2019). Line managers encourage staff to take part in diversity initiatives that might otherwise go underutilized Breaugh and Frye, (2008) and Greene and Kirton, (2011), and their stereotypes affect whether demographic diversity creates unfavorable organizational environments (Kunze, Boehm & Bruch, 2013). In consistent with forging arguments reviewing mangers perception their demographic dissimilarity in term of age, gender, education, and tenure makes a difference in understanding diversity and its

implementation. The relational demography literature frequently examines differences in terms of these demographic traits. (e.g., Bhawe, Kramer & Glomb, et al, 2010; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). The study found a distinguish variable of educational background which envisaged exclusive understandings of responses. Hence, with reference to this variable, Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez, (2018) findings evident that last degree specialization and orientation with diversity and inclusion enables much in developing or enhancing their perception. Later this analysis linked role of reputable educational institute which remarkably inculcate professional acumen.

The role of organizational cultures during career journey of a person craft significant difference in personal development and perception about diversity effectiveness. Organizational culture plays instrumental role in values orientation and objectively instills insight to influence organizational goals (Taneja, Sewell & Odom, 2015., Wahyuningsih, et al .2019, Sabuhari, et al, 2020) Study findings calculated effective implementation of policies and programs form an inclusive culture which socialize its employees in a manner as epitome of organizational values. In addition country culture feature of "patriarchy" was underlined as an ambiguity in understanding useful utilization of diversity in organizational setting. The careful examination in this research unquestionably shows that "leadership responsibility" with a structured feedback mechanism may guarantee the formation of a diversity culture.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that Pakistani human resource managers employed by MNCs do not see the phenomenon of diversity to be absurd. They comprehend diversity as gender, age, disability, education, region, language, religion and skills. A substantive finding of "social class" adds in Pakistani cultural based definition of diversity context .Therefore, literature that

portrays Asian nations as being homogeneous and unrelated to diversity management has been challenged with evidence of existing difference and organizational policies. It is also clear that all policies of multinational corporations focus on the different needs of employees but put specific focus on diversity characteristic of “gender” interchangeably use as “woman” alone.

Essentially the under study firms are commercial and their HR departments place a greater emphasis on finding the suitable employee for the position than on diversifying the organization. MNCs promote diversity in term of competitiveness, knowledge and skill instead demographics dissimilates or deep level aspect of diversity. Study findings conclusively accent that diversity has not been institutionalized as a corporate strategic goal. Gender of manager however has slight effect in perceiving workplace differences and their value, unanimously conceive diversity effective for organization.

Nevertheless results found a little impression of “women” specificity of her workplace role different from men which are embedded in stereotypical connotation about women and socialization pattern of manager too. It is indeed connected with the prevalence of male dominance in Pakistani society. In study findings manager’s demographic dissimilarity substantiated a significant factor which undeniably reinforce manager role as supportive or disrupting for organizational policies. Further dissimilarity of manager’s demographics in term of educational background, age, work experience and reputation of professional degree institute found foremost factors for a company policy implementation and outcomes. Indeed organizational culture and leadership accountability were found touchstone to avoid manager’s personal prejudices and biases.

Future Recommendation

Some avenues for further research appear encouraging. Present research was conducted to

find out local context base definition of diversity and manager’s perception about its effectiveness supplemented with gender difference of managers. This study results can be augmented with senior management responses and evaluation of manager’s performance while managing diversity. Similarly, employee responses later can provide a holistic view of organizational standpoint for diversity and its management. Further in continuation difference and effect of gender of manager role can be assessed more objectively if study incorporate diversity management practices MNCs performing in Pakistan’s male dominated cultural context.

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