

POLI 457 Human Resource Development and Management

Session 7 – Diversity management in Organizations 1

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Session Overview

This session is about diversity management in organizations. The discussions here will focus on the meaning of diversity, the dimensions of diversity, and why organizations have become diverse. Students will understand that diversity is about the differences among the workforce in organizations.

Session Outline

- Topic One: Diversity
- Topic Two: Individual strategies for managing diversity

Reading Materials

- Denhardt, R.B. & Denhardt, J.V., 2009. *Public Administration: An Action Orientation* (6th Edition). Thomson Wadsworth: USA.
- DeNisi, A. S. & Griffin, R. W., 2008. *Human Resource Management* (3rd Edition). Houghton Mifflin Company: USA:
- **John Schermerhorn, James Hunt, and Richard Osborn** (2005), *Organizational Behavior* (9th Edition), Wiley.
- **David Whetten and Kim Cameron** (2005), *Developing Management Skills* (Sixth Edition) Pearson Prentice Hall
- **Robert Kreitner and Angelo Kinicki** (1998), *Organizational Behavior* (fourth Edition), Irwin-McGraw-Hill

Topic One: Diversity

- Diversity in organization means when the workers in the organization differ on a number of dimensions (DeNisi and Griffin 2008). This means there are a lot of differences among the workers. The implication is that when workers are exactly the same, there is no diversity in the organization. When workers are different from one another on certain dimensions it can be an asset to the organization. However, this can also be a source of conflict among the workers if this diversity is not properly managed. The next section will focus on how individuals can manage diversity in order to enhance productivity.
- The importance of diversity has led to the adoption of laws by governments and even some organizations just to ensure that workers in both the public and private sectors are diverse. Once workers are diverse, it is very likely organizations will benefit from the expertise of different people. Now let us discuss some of the popular dimensions of diversity we have in Ghana and other parts of the world.

- The first we want to explain is race. Race has to do with the color of people. In Ghana because most of us are black we do not see this as an issue. But we need to know that some Ghanaians have middle-eastern and Asian origins (Lebanese and Indian Ghanaians), and this indicates that organizations that have workers with different racial makeup will be described as diverse organizations. This dimension is more felt in countries like Brazil and the United States of America where you see people of different racial backgrounds. In the US, for example, they talk about Asian Americans, Hispanic Africans, African Americans, Native Americans, Caucasian Americans, and others. In Brazil, too, the population is split between whites and blacks.

- Another dimension is ethnicity. This has to do with the ethnic background of workers in an organization. There are many ethnic groups in Ghana and most African countries, and an organization that is committed to diversity must make the effort to have workers from as many ethnic groups as possible. This means having all your workers from one ethnic group may not be considered as a diverse workforce. Although there can be some differences among workers from a particular ethnic group, it is essential for organizations that want to be competitive to look beyond one ethnic group in employee selection.

- Age distribution of workers is also an important indicator of diversity. Organizations that espouse diversity must make the effort to have workers from the various age groups. This means in Ghana where the retirement age is 60, some of the workers must be between 50 and 60, 40 and 50, 30 and 40, and 20 and 30. Having all your workers in a particular age group, say from 20 to 30, may not qualify as a diverse organization.

- Gender is one of the popular dimensions of diversity. Gender denotes males and females or men and women. In Ghana and many other countries (including developed countries) women are not equally represented in government and other leading organizations. For the variable of gender to make organizations diverse, human resource managers must make a conscious effort to give opportunities to women in organizations. This is why some countries and organizations have affirmative action policies, which allow women and other underrepresented groups to be given certain advantages when it comes to employment. Affirmative action is the “use of positive, results-oriented practices to ensure that women, minorities, handicapped people, and other protected classes of people will be equitably represented in the organization” (Denhardt and Denhardt 2009:320). With affirmative action and gender, when a man and woman have the same qualifications, the job will be given to the woman. And if the minimum qualification is five years experience and a man has 10 years and a woman has six years, the job will be given to the woman because she meets the basic qualifications for employment.

- The last dimension we want to discuss is religion. Religion shows people's belief in the Supreme Being (God) or other divine entities. An organization that embraces employees from different religious persuasions will be described as diverse and vice versa. Some of the religious groups are Christians, Muslims, African Traditional Religion, Hindus, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hare Krishna, and others. At times depending on the location of an organization, it is important that you have workers from as different religious groups as possible. You can also have differences within the same religious groups.

Sample questions

- Describe any two dimensions of diversity that are not discussed here.
- How can a diverse workforce help an organization to be more competitive?

Topic Two: Individual strategies for managing diversity

- DeNisi and Griffin (2008) have noted that there are four main strategies used by individuals to deal with diversity in the workplace. These four strategies are understanding, empathy, tolerance, and communication. In addition to the four, we will also look at how training can promote diversity among workers in organizations.
- Understanding implies that individuals working with people that are different from them must understand the meaning of diversity as having people that are different along a number of dimensions working in the same organization. As a worker it becomes your responsibility to coexist with other workers in the organization so that you can meet the expectations and responsibilities placed on you and coworkers in the organization.

- Secondly, empathy suggests that workers should understand the world and human beings from the perspective of others. In other words, workers should put themselves in the shoes of others to understand them better. The implication here is that, when workers understand the world from the perspectives of others, they will be willing to team up with others to accomplish the goals of the organization. For instance, as a worker from an urban area, if you can understand that those from the rural areas do things different from those from the urban centers, you can easily work together. Nevertheless, if you think those from the rural areas should do things just like those from the urban centers; it will just create problems in the organization.

- Individuals can also use tolerance to deal with diversity in their organizations. Tolerance indicates workers should be tolerant of the way of life and behavior of others. There are some people you just do not like their way of life and behavior, but if you are concerned about getting the job done in the organization, these people must be tolerated. Tolerance is just very difficult, but not impossible. You can have colleagues who just want to disagree over everything in the workplace, but if they can be tolerated by other workers, the organization can achieve its goals. You may not even like to see people eating with their hands in the lunch room, but if you can tolerate that there is no way workers cannot work together.

- Moreover, communication can serve a way to address problems related to diversity. When workers speak with or communicate with each other in the organization, each worker will be in a position to explain why they do certain things. Communication can help different workers to work together because most of the preconceived ideas some workers have about others will become a thing of the past. Mainly, you need to understand that by communicating with others, you are more likely to tolerate, understand, and empathize with them.

- Finally, organizations can organize diversity training programs to help workers get along with other workers in the organization. These training programs dwell on such topics as the importance of having a diverse workforce, workers and tolerance, respecting differences among workers, and etc. Organizations that have workers along the different dimensions we discussed in section 5 will see diversity training as very important in the sense that, without workers understanding the diversity among them, the organizations as well as those in management positions in the organizations are those that will suffer most. In view of this, organizations organize seminars and workshops for their workers to help them work well with others and also work well alone.

Conclusion

- The session has presented the meaning of diversity in organizational management and the various dimensions of diversity in modern organizations. It concluded with a discussion on the strategies used by individuals to manage or handle diversity.

Sample questions

- Describe four strategies used by workers in Ghana to deal with diversity in their organizations.
- Why is it important to organize diversity training for workers in Ghana?

Further Readings

- Denhardt, R.B. & Denhardt, J.V., 2009. *Public Administration: An Action Orientation* (6th Edition). Thomson Wadsworth: USA.
- DeNisi, A. S. & Griffin, R. W., 2008. *Human Resource Management* (3rd Edition). Houghton Mifflin Company: USA:
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