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MULTICULTURAL TEAMS: MOVING FROM DIVERISTY TO INCLUSION

Empirical
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Abstract

In today's dynamic global market, a place where cultural diversity prevails and people search for more and more opportunities across border, trying to succeed in cultural diverse, challenging environments, what we must do is create an environment where "we" is everyone. As organizations become transnational entities, it is becoming more important for the leaders to understand workforce diversity and inclusion.

The objective of the present study is to identify the diversity gaps that exist in organizational members perceptions by using as an instrument of research a questionnaire focused on diversity awareness, respect and appreciation of differences and reluctance and ease of interacting and working with members of different culture, in a multinational company in Romania.

Introduction

Motto: "The future of the human race lies in maintaining its diversity and turning that to its advantage" (E.T. Hall).

In the nowadays' labor market employees can chose easier to work in another country then the one they were born in if they are not satisfied with the salary or conditions from their national labor market. Therefore migration is increasing every year conducing to a more cultural diverse environment at the work place, especially in multinational companies.

This trend of leaving your country to work in another one is encouraged first of all by learning in another country possibilities offered to students through different programs like Erasmus or POSDRU projects. There are lots of students that took this possibility and after finishing their study in the foreign country choose to remain and work there. This has conducted further to cultural diversity at their workplace. It is also true that the desire of students for international experiences is empowered by hirers, especially multinational companies, which pay attention to this detail when are hiring. Why is that? Probably because multinational companies have their own organizational culture and people with international experiences can adapt easily to its work environment and also in these companies it is very likely to work with people of different cultures. More over an employee with an international experience is preferred over one without this kind of experience because he can accept easier the culture difference and can work better with a person with a different culture.

Having a diverse workforce has its benefits but it is not enough for a company to be successful because in order for people of different culture to work better and to obtain the highest performance it needs to create an inclusive environment. Each individual must be included and accept the cultural differences in a way that they can be proud of being part of this culture diverse environment. In order to manage this any company should embed an inclusion program, through which it can be aware of its employee skills for inclusion and cultural diversity and based of this information can offer feedback and support to fill the gaps identified.

Moving from diversity to inclusion

A distinctive feature of the world of globalization we live in is awareness and recognition of cultural diversity, as each individual is unique and has a defined cultural background experiences throughout life. This is of great interest because the human resource is seen in this century as a competitive advantage. Humans are the most important resource of an organization. Hofstede has shown in his research (Hofstede, 2001) the importance of culture in human relations in the

work environment. He defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 2001) and considers that ways of thinking, feeling and acting (mental programs) are well ingrained in the mind of an individual and are taught from childhood. It is very difficult to unlearn what a person has already learned through experiences lived during his development as an adult (Hofstede, 2010).

In order to deliver high performance multicultural teams need to develop culturally appropriate strategies to manage the task as well as the process. In solving these problems teams usually create their own culture. Research seems to indicate that multicultural teams tend to perform either much better or much worse than monocultural teams (Adler, 1991). Research conducted on team's performance suggests that homogeneous teams can overshadow in terms of performance heterogeneous ones due to the fact that team members have similar profiles (Belbin, 1981). Other research has further demonstrated that multicultural teams perform better than monocultural ones in identifying problem perspectives and generating alternatives (Watson et al., 1993). Usually the teams lose their motivation if a share sense of purpose and belonging is not created and if it is not determined who needs to be involved and decided who needs to do a specific task to get the job done.

The multicultural organization is characterized by pluralism, full integration of minority – culture members both formally and informally, an absence of prejudice and discrimination and low level of inter-group conflict. Successful multicultural teams are those which found ways of integrating the contribution of their members and have learned to find solutions that add value due to their diversity not despite of it. Adler & Nancy (1997) stated that "highly productive and less productive teams differ in how they manage diversity, not, as it is commonly believed, in the presence or absence of diversity".

Therefore, in a multinational company we meet different ways of thinking, feeling and acting thus we encounter cultural diversity. Different members find it more difficult to communicate and collaborate to achieve common objectives than some similar members, and between members of different cultures are more likely to appear conflicts (Schoenecker et al., 1997). Thus, a company seeking performance must take measures to stimulate collaboration among employees, especially if they are culturally heterogeneous. Multiculturalism and diversity of human cultures often leads to attitudes, norms, communication patterns, and / or different behaviors (Dietz, 2007). The benefits of diversity in a global economy are well recognized (Allen et al., 2008), but cultural factors are a differentiating source of working

group members, and the diversity of members directly affects communication and collaboration (Preda, 2006) and thus performance. That is why employees may face cultural issues at diverse workplace and could leave the organization (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

Some case studies from management literature suggest that homogeneous teams might have higher performance although heterogeneity may increase creativity (Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007). It also has to be mentioned that most studies on diversity influences have been based on the assumption that diversity has a linear impact (Richard et al., 2007) but few of them have taken into consideration the benefits of different culture interactions on work team's outcomes.

Diverse culture in a company can arise from various sources such as people from different religion, ethnic origin or languages. Thus cultural diversity means much more and can be defined as "the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance" (Cox, 1993). At first the approach for multiculturalism or cultural inclusion was for minority groups to adapt to the cultural requirements of the majority group. But afterwards the perspective of diversity has arisen and minorities started asking for social justice and as a result moral, ethical and social responsibilities were gained toward them. Second, the civil rights law has forced companies to find alternative ways to eliminate racial and gender discrimination. Third, in the global market place, companies are more pressured to acknowledge and deal with cultural diversity, in a way that it can be transformed into a competitive advantage.

Diversity has not only a positive impact on organizational reputation or brings substantial benefits such as better decision making, best talented candidates, a safe and cooperative working environment, greater creativity and innovation within the organization (Nachbagauer and Riedl, 2002), increase well-being, but also completely transforms it to a learning organization (Schmidt and Parker, 2002). Conversely, cultural differences within workforce also bring potential costs in higher turnover, interpersonal conflict and communication breakdowns (Cox, 1993). Research and experience assure that cross cultural communication is an essential part of embedding an inclusive environment (Adler and Nancy, 1997).

Inclusion involves removing barriers or obstacles perceived to be unfair and make sure that every individual reaches his or her full potential without requiring cultural assimilation (Taylor, 1992). Moreover, as stated by Miller (1994), inclusive groups encourage and bring divergence of view to light, because they realize it leads to effective solutions and is more flexible and adaptable to situations. In this approach inclusion is

seen as providing benefits to individuals, organizations, groups, society as a whole.

Some of the organizations adopt diversity and inclusion trainings just to fulfill legal requirements (Hur et al., 2010) such as safety and equal employment opportunities, other practice diversity training as a component of diversity strategy to build a more respectful inclusive work environment where employees can contribute to their fullest potential which will lead to employees' engagement. In this context leaders of the 21st century are the ones being charged to develop climates of trust, empathy and mutual respect in order to achieve organization goals, such as attraction and retention, customer satisfaction and productivity.

Diversity and inclusion is not a fashionable topic it is a necessity that makes the difference in a picture where everyone is looking for an identity. In addition it is imperative to determine whether managers are competent enough to do their job or they need more education in order to manage the diverse workforce effectively.

Research methodology

In order to identify the perception of different culture members regarding challenges and opportunities associated with an increasingly diverse workforce a questionnaire survey was applied on a sample of 19 employees, men and women, from two different teams. Team 1 has ten members, all male and Team 2 has nine members from which one is male and the rest female. The survey was conducted in the headquarters of a multinational company from Romania. The questionnaire contains 35 questions with 5 point Likert-type responses (from "Strongly Agree" = 5 to "Strongly Disagree" = 1).

The first part of the questionnaire helped determining the perception of the members regarding diversity, how different they see themselves from the others in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion and beliefs, costumes and culture. Second part of the questionnaire determined the diversity of the persons that surrounds each member of the teams in their personal life. If they have friends who are different from them in the points of view enumerated previously. The last part, but the most important, contains questions regarding situational aspects like being comfortable to interact with people that do not share the same values, culture, nationality, language, and ethnicity. Also this last part contains questions regarding the respect for other member's culture, values, life style, beliefs and the willingness of collaborating with people different from them in these terms.

Employees were told that participation in the survey was voluntary and confidential. Most of the respondents taking part in this study ranged in age from 25's up to 39's and have a Master's

degree. As for the respondents' nationality the percentages are illustrated in Figure 1.

In Team 1 four members have indian nationality and six romanian nationality. In the second team more nationalities can be encountered – peruvian (one), mexican (one), hungarian (one) and romanian (six).

Results and discussion

Comparing the results of the surveys, several differences can be identified between the team members' answers. Looking in Figure 2 at the answers for Q5 to Q9, regarding the members' perception regarding differences it can be observed that in Team 1 the average of the responses are closer to Agree and Strongly agree opposed to Team 2 where the average of the answers are closer to Neither disagree Nor agree. This means that in Team 1 the diversity is more well perceived than in Team 2.

Looking in Figure 3 it can be noticed that the members from Team 1 consider that they have many friends with different ethnicity, nationality, customs and culture, religious views or beliefs. For example at Question 13, "I have many friends with different religious or beliefs than mine", the average of responses is 3.8, which is close to Agree, while in Team 2 the average of responses is 3, which means Neither disagree nor agree.

Further more, looking at Figure 4, at the questions regarding their comfort level of interacting with someone who is different from them in terms of nationality, race/ethnicity, beliefs or customs and cultures, religion the differences were not as notable as the previous ones. Following analysis of sample data it has been concluded that overall, male or female, feel comfortable when it comes to interacting with people different from them from the points of view mentioned previously. The average in both teams were close to Agree, "I am comfortable in the given situations"(Figure 4).

Also it has to be mentioned that common tool for a successful communication between the native and non-native employees is English, however none of the respondents' mother tongue is English. It seems that some of non-native members have to confront differences in language. (Q16 "I feel comfortable dealing with people from different language"). "Choice of language can create winners and losers as language dominance is often synonymous with power and influence." (Becker and Fritzsche, 1987).

The finding of Q19 (Figure 5) "I enjoy interacting with people from different culture", where the average of responses in both teams is Agree, means that both expatriats and romanians are opened to new experiences in terms of collaboration. Even though they have no worries when it comes to interacting with people from different cultures (Q33 – Figure 5), Q 22 "I always know what to say when interacting with people

from different culture", with an average of Neither disagree nor agree, may explain the necessity of implementing diversity training programs to support employees to feel more comfortable and to find their words easily. Therefore, employees cannot be expected to work successfully with other nationalities if they are not provided with appropriate language and cultural training.

Also from Figure 5 it can be stated that the members of both teams respect the life style and values of people from different cultures (Q 23 and 24 where the average answer is between Agree and Strongly agree). This respect is shown in the answers at Q 20 "I avoid those situations where I have to deal with people from different cultures", where the average answers in both teams is Disagree.

Last but not least important non-native employees admit to have poor listening skills (Q 30 where answers were between Disagree and Neither disagree Nor agree).

Answers of foreigners employees state the lack of information regarding Romanian culture. Q 35 "Romania culture helps to promote the Diversity and Inclusion" Romania does not have a long history on diversity management or inclusion but adopts proposals from UE. Principle of equalities are reflected not only in Labour Code, Employment Act and in Anti-discrimination Law, as well as in programs like Equality for Men and Women or Support program for disable people.

Following analysis of sample data it has been concluded that there are seen no notable differences between answers of Romanian men and women in the given fields. Theoretically this finding is important because ethnic minorities tend to be subject of diversity training.

Conclusions and recommendation

Managing diversity at work is not an easy assignment and usually is easier said than done. However, the solution for a successful communication and interaction lies in our behavior toward each other and thus need to be taken into account from the CEO to the lowest level worker. Diversity and inclusion are closely linked and organizations need both to build and retain the workforce with diverse cultures and backgrounds in order to succeed in the current global business competitive environment.

Linked to the organization's motivation and goals authors emphasize the need for Diversity training and Intercultural communication training programs, offered by Diversity and Inclusion Training Department and not necessary assigned to Human Resources Departments, if there is no one with diversity skills set, to further develop the knowledge and abilities to communicate with people from different cultures backgrounds and be able to monitor and adjust own behavior to deal

effectively with those individuals. Both of these diversity initiatives embrace inclusion as a desirable goal for business success and competitiveness.

Inclusion involves removing barriers or obstacles perceived to be unfair and make sure that every individual reaches his or her full potential without requiring cultural assimilation (Taylor, 1992). Moreover, as stated by Miller (1994), inclusive groups encourage and bring disagreements to light, because they realize it leads to effective solutions and are more flexible and adaptable to situations. In this approach inclusion is seen as providing benefits to individuals, organizations, groups, society as a whole.

In addition it is imperative to determine whether managers are competent enough to do their job or they need more education in order to manage the diverse workforce effectively.

On the other hand there are some reasons that failure diversity training programs such as, insufficient leadership support, missing integrating diversity into organizations strategic plans and not the last lack of commitment from organization member's side (Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) - Research Spotlight: Workplace Diversity Practices Pol, 2010).

Limitations and suggestions for further research

There are some limitations of this study. Firstly the research study is limited to a small sample size from one company. Therefore the results cannot be generalized and future research should include a larger sample from several types of multinationals in various industries and different locations. Moreover it will be interesting to examine how diversity training programs influence employees' attitude.

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Figure 1 Respondents' nationalities

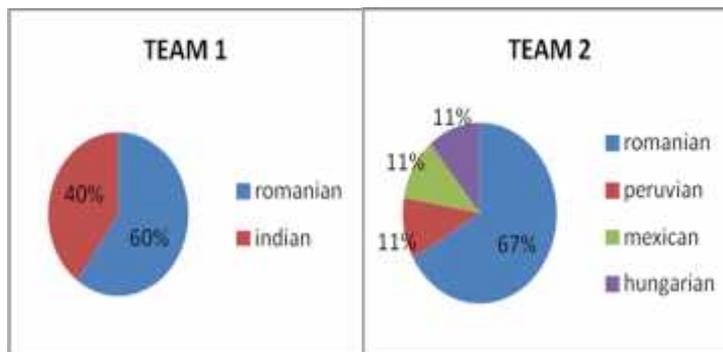


Figure 2 Respondents' answers regarding difference perception

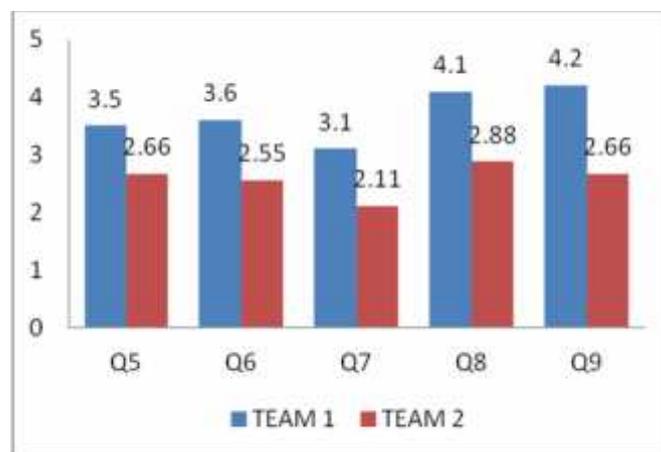


Figure 3 Respondents' answers regarding cultural diverse friends

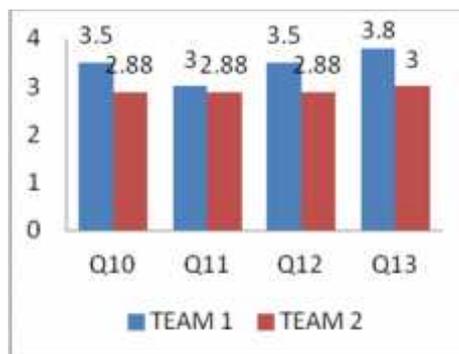


Figure 4 Respondents' answers regarding comfortability in interacting

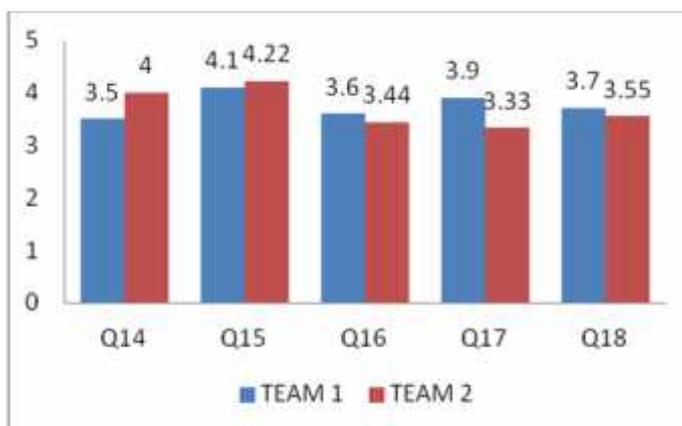


Figure 5 Respondents' answers regarding situational aspects

