



WIDENING THE HORIZON: FROM AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS TO DIVERSITY

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1. Introduction

Today, workforce diversity is seen as a tool to incorporate various similarities and differences in the workforce in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. for the purpose of achieving organizational goals. While the conventional efforts on the part of employer in terms of Equal employment opportunity and Affirmative actions are not plenteous to manage the complex diverse workforce today, the roots of Workforce diversity are assimilated in the concepts of Equal employment opportunity and Affirmative Actions to combat the problem of employee discrimination. Since the mid-1960s, three distinct phases of diversity management have evolved. First, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity (EEO) employment policies sought to increase the representation of minorities and women in many areas of employment and to reduce discriminatory practices. Second, as people from diverse backgrounds started entering, organizations started to try to change their workplace culture with the help of awareness programmes and accommodation of diverse characteristics. Thirdly, there has been a gradual shift from 'valuing diversity' to 'managing diversity'. These shifts started linking changes in work practices to workforce diversity.

2. Affirmative Actions:

Affirmative actions are the affirmations to the insecure and dissatisfied work force in any part of the country, the actions are taken by a firm, institute or an organization to improve the employment and educational opportunities of members of minority group viz. Women, ethnic minorities. The society is highly diverse in respect to rich and poor, ethical differences, cultural variations, educational background and racial description thus post world war era was a crucial time period for the countries to affirm the security to its employees and in general to the population residing there and helping them regain their worth in the society.

The policy is also known as employment equity and it was adopted to favor the members of the society who are currently facing any discrimination or have had faced it in history thus stagnating their growth in the society. Historical reasons for such discrimination can be slavery, oppression and injustice against the vulnerable classes. These actions were considered as the most affective measure to bridge the gap between the uplifted and the down trodden social classes. The nature of affirmative actions taken may vary from region to region depending upon the type of cultural and economical setup. There always are specific reasons for any country to adopt such methods to uplift their work force and capable class of people irrespective of their social differences. Thus the idea of implementing such reforms was looked upon as a trailblazer to the battle against discrimination in all the forms.

2.1 Purpose of Affirmative Action Programs- Review of the Researches Conducted

Affirmative Actions are eventual policies and practices constructed to redress the historical form of discrimination based on various factors (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie & Lev-Arey, 2006; Resendez, 2002). Affirmative actions have been able to serve those individuals who were historically and traditionally disadvantaged in all the spheres where they are underrepresented (Resendez, 2002). According to Crosby, Ayer & Sincharoen, 2006, these programs help organizations detect any ongoing discrimination practice by monitoring the issue by collecting systematic and relevant data examining the trends and identifying the causes behind the problem thus improving their workforce management. Affirmative action is considered to be an effective, superior way of eliminating or reducing the impact of discrimination (Crosby, Iyer & Sincharoen, 2006; Bell, Harrison, & McLaughlin, 2000; Harrison et al., 2006; Resendez, 2002).

Without such a proactive approach, organizations are generally reliant on minority groups to advocate for themselves (Crosby & Ropp, 2002, cited Crosby, Iyer & Sincharoen, 2006). It is asserted that reliance on self-advocacy is problematic for a couple of reasons:

1. Many people are not even aware if discrimination takes place (Crosby, Iyer & Sincharoen, 2006). Matheson, Raspopow & Anisman, 2012 explained the phenomenon known as “denial of personal discrimination”. It recognizes that individual members of minority groups come to believe they are personally less disadvantaged than other members of the group (Crosby et al. 2003, cited in Crosby, Iyer & Sincharoen, 2006).
2. Even if the group facing the discrimination is aware of it, they often void seeking redress as they feel it would be ineffectual rather than benefiting them in any form. They don't come forward until they reach the level of saturation and are so angry that actions taken result in conflict that is potentially damaging to them (Crosby & Ropp, 2002, cited in Crosby, Iyer & Sincharoen, 2006).

Affirmative Actions impact recipients in a different manner. These attitudes may be viewed as negative or positive. There are two ways in which recipients of affirmative action may come to perceive that it is associated with negative attitudes of the majority group.

1. These actions can leave a perception reflecting the assumption led by majority group about inferiority of recipient group. For example, Heilman and Alcott (2001) found that women who learned that others believed that they were beneficiaries of preferential selection perceived that these other people held negative expectations of their competence.
2. Second, to the extent to which affirmative action is seen to be imposed rather than voluntarily adopted, recipients may anticipate that others will view the procedures as unjust and thus become resentful and resistant. Indeed, Heilman (1996) suggests that beneficiaries of affirmative action often become stigmatized by others because they are seen as less deserving of their status than those for whom affirmative action does not apply (e.g., Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay, 1981).

According to Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995, such policies may be perceived as a help by the makers of the policy as a true support and with a perception of motivation towards the sections benefiting from these approaches.

2.2 Affirmative action policies in India

Affirmative actions are not a new approach in India, it dates back to the colonial era when reservation programs for government jobs, political systems and scholarships for certain classes were set up and thus marking the beginning of a new era of accommodating the vulnerable classes into the system (Kumar, 1992). The initial and pioneer affirmative action policy in India was establishing quota in Baroda and Kohlapur in western India. After this system, parliamentary seats were reserved for various castes and were published under British rule in 1936 (Osborne, 2001). After such efforts were introduced, India's struggle for complete swaraj took a massive turn and soon after attaining independence in 1947, the new administration system introduced by Jawahar Lal Nehru and the other officials of congress party maintained the reservation system being incorporated in legislature (Osborne, 2001). India's constitution has considered the need of special consideration to members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the two most disadvantaged groups in India in Article 46. According to Weisskopf (2003), the above efforts paved the way for state and central government to reserve seats for schedule caste and schedule tribes in college admissions.

Another group was introduced as OBC "other backward classes" who were considered to be more advantaged than the above discussed classes, but less benefitted than the upper classes. Though constitution strictly prohibited discrimination in any form against OBC but it did not take any specific affirmative action policies for them. Then in 1953, the central government formed a commission to study the situation of the OBC, and the commission recommended that an additional 2399 "backward" castes—roughly 40% of the population— should also be eligible for reservations (De Zwart, 2000). The affirmative action was though seen as one of the firm actions for uplifting the backward classes but it was not acted upon well by the central government. Instead, the central government left the power to grant concessions to other backward caste groups to individual states. So states had complete freedom of introducing special reserved seats for OBC in work force and education system. While many states began to institute reserve seats for the OBC in state-controlled colleges, there were no reserved seats for OBC in nationally controlled colleges (Baley, 1999).

The most remarkable and still functional affirmation and retaining the Indian workforce and broadening the aspect of employee as well as students in educational institutes, it was in year 1978, that the central government formed a second exploratory commission—known as the Mandal Commission—to explore again the situation of the OBC. This commission after extensive research-identified 3747 castes, or 52% of the population, as backward (de Zwart, 2000, Wolpert, 2006). The commission proposed the need of 27% of reservation for the OBC in university admissions, public sector jobs and all private sector endeavors that receive financial assistance from the government (Kumar, 1992; Weisskopf, 2003). Until the year 1990, this report was not brought under action and then it was decided to enforce the recommendations only to public sector jobs. The recommendations were adopted but it led to mass agitation and riots throughout the country. In 1992, the Supreme Court vindicated the Mandal reservations for public sector jobs, and brought in a new clause to suppress the rage among public by stating that the central and state governments will exclude the creamy layer i.e. the richer members, of OBC from reservations in public sector jobs (Osborne, 2001; Wolpert, 2006). The original affirmative action plan in the name of reservation was set to expire in the year 1960 but it extended over the years and was proposed to expire in 2010. Education being the most affirm way of introducing classes as effective workforce, its importance in the system was talked about with great authorities. Beginning in 2005, reservations in education were once again at the forefront of Indian politics. In August 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that the government could not impose quotas in privately funded colleges. This rule led to the passage of the 93rd Constitution Amendment Act, which gave the government the power to institute affirmative

action policies in all “educational institutions.” In May 2006, the government announced a plan to extend the 27% systems for administrative positions in the more progressive state governments, such as Mysore in South India, and reservation for the OBC to all central universities, resulting in massive protests. Parliament passed the bill in the winter session of 2006–2007. However, in March 2007, the Supreme Court gave a stay order on the bill, citing the lack of data on which groups are indeed economically and socially disadvantaged. Thus, as in many other countries, affirmative action continues to be a contentious topic in the Indian education policy debate.

3. Workforce Diversity

Diversity can be defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. (Esty et al. 1995). Robbins (2003) defined diversity as a dimension which can be used to differentiate a group from another. Diverse workforce indicates a heterogeneous approach of organization in managing their employees in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, education, in which an employee may possess unique set of qualities which can be beneficial for the organization (Buckingham, 2102).

Hazard (2004) has opined that work force diversity is a broad range of difference that brings out how people interact and achieve their business goals. Employees in a company will always possess difference and distinct features making them different from one another. The key elements which bring these changes may be beliefs, values and actions that vary by age, gender, religion, ethnicity, Lifestyle, education and physical abilities.

Work force diversity has been an important aspect for a company’s performance whether good or bad (Shani and Lau, 2005). So insight knowledge of the concept will help the organizations to overcome their challenges of managing the type, number and performance of their employee. A country like India where there is a large diverse population and the jobs they are indulged in are also dependent on diverse variables like their age, gender, ethnic background, educational qualification. Understanding and managing the diverse nature of an organization has become utmost necessity to mark its up gradation in the world economic front.

A country’s population consists of amalgamated population due to increasing immigration and emigration, presence of indigenous ethnic community, women being more active and upfront with their career now a days and thus bringing a whole lot of diverse population to work together in an organization, which in turns bring new ideas, creative methodologies to overcome a challenge and most importantly an healthy environment to work in. Each set of population coming together will bring a culturally unique life style along with them Adler, (1997).

3.1 Required Tools for Managing Diversity Effectively

Managers are aware that certain skills are necessary for creating a successful, diverse workforce. To understand and reaffirm that discrimination is completely eradicated, managers should firstly understand what discrimination is and what its consequences are. Secondly, managers must recognize their own cultural biases and prejudices (Koonce 2001). Diversity does not account for differences among groups, but rather about differences among individuals. Each individual is unique and does not represent or speak for a particular group. Finally, managers must be willing to change the organization if necessary. It becomes responsibility of an organization to manage the group of individual working with. Organizations need to learn how to manage diversity in the workplace to be successful in the future (Flagg 2002).

It mainly depends on the manager's ability to understand what is best for the organization based on teamwork and the dynamics of the workplace. According to Roosevelt (2001), managing diversity is a comprehensive process for creating a work environment that includes everyone. When creating a successful diverse workforce, an effective manager should focus on personal awareness. Both managers and associates need to be aware of their personal biases.

Though organizations hold training programmes for both managerial posts as well as other employees. But understanding the concept of diversity management is a gradual process. Therefore, organizations need to develop, implement, and maintain ongoing training because a one-day session of training will not change people's behaviors according to Koonce (2001). Further research by Koonce in 2001 stated that managers should expect change to be slow, while at the same time encouraging change. According to him, another vital requirement when dealing with diversity is promoting a safe place for associates to communicate.

Managers must also understand that fairness is not necessarily equality. There are always exceptions to the rule. Managing diversity is about more than equal employment opportunity and affirmative action (Losyk 1996). Social gatherings and business meetings, where every member must listen and have the chance to speak, are good ways to create dialogues. Managers should implement policies such as mentoring programs to provide associates access to information and opportunities. Also, associates should never be denied necessary, constructive, critical feedback for learning about mistakes and successes (Flagg 2002).

A diverse workforce is a reflection of a changing world and marketplace. Diverse work teams bring high value to organizations. Respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity. Diversity management benefits associates by creating a fair and safe environment where everyone has access to opportunities and challenges. Management tools in a diverse workforce should be used to educate everyone about diversity and its issues, including laws and regulations. Most workplaces are made up of diverse cultures, so organizations need to learn how to adapt to be successful.

4. From Affirmation and Assurance to Diversity

With greater advancement in global front in almost all the spheres has enlightened the need to satisfy every being as a part of economy. Management researchers, organizational heads, Human resource departments and education system makers and amenders have taken the evolutionary leap from establishing equal employment opportunity to affirming that the person is satisfied with the job to finally arriving at diversifying the existing workforce to create an environment free of discriminations, stagnancy and promoting more creative ideas by introducing varied classes to the system. This becomes mandatory for diverse public agencies to consider plurality of values and concerns and to incorporate the voices of a greater section of population. The inclusion of the wide variety of citizen in the workforce is essential as well as mandatory for an organization to function irrespective of the type of work organization is related to.

When diversity is pursued as an organizational objective, more efficient management and the democratic values of responsiveness and representation in public administration are both said to be better achieved. Diversity puts emphasis on bringing together people of different personality, work style and cultural aura so as to manifest social diversities such as gender and ethnicity and using them as pillars of organization's success.

Workforce diversity, according to the literature, is proven to be beneficial for the organization including increased production capacity and organizational flexibility contributions to fairness in the

workplace, greater compliance with personnel regulations, increased representation and responsiveness among members of the bureaucracy, and more grassroots support for agency programs and policies. By adopting such diverse policies organization will be able to glorify in the market and provides better job satisfaction to the workforce.

Unresolved diversity problems, it has been shown, often deflect employee energy and attention from performance, with a consequent loss of productivity, and can cause an organization to lose valued employees. Diversity management in the public sector, as in any organization, is a multidimensional challenge that requires permanent and focused managerial attention. Proponents of diversity management suggest that organizations must be able to realistically diagnose the status of their organization to determine the right strategies for diversity management, and several schemes have been developed for that purpose.

4.1 Affirmative Action v/s Diversity

Diversity and affirmative action are both initiatives that go hand in hand. However, diversity takes a step further than affirmative action and builds on the initial ideas and concepts of equal opportunity employment. Without affirmative action a firm would not be able to recruit and promote a diverse workforce, without which the window to diversity initiatives would not be accessible where people are valued for the differences and unique ideas, beliefs, values, etc. There are, however, a number of differences between the two.

Affirmative action is focused on improving the number of diverse employees hired. Diversity, on the other hand, aims at changing the organization's culture to be more accepting of varying views, values and differences. While affirmative action is mandatory, diversity is voluntary and focuses on a wider approach to include not only those previously disadvantaged, but also to include other groups of individuals regardless of their beliefs, religions, perspectives, values, political views, sexual orientation, etc.

5. Conclusion

Managing diversity is often confused with the affirmative actions taken by the organization. It becomes all the most important to understand the crucial differentiating line between the two terms thus working upon the idea of affirming a diverse population together to work for any economy's growth. Affirmative action, valuing diversity and managing diversity are separate points on the continuum of interventions designed to stimulate the inclusion of people from different backgrounds in an organization.

Affirmative action is based on an assimilations' model that focuses on getting people into an organization rather than changing organizational culture (valuing diversity). Subsequently, managing diversity, while based on cultural change, is a pragmatic business strategy that focuses on maximizing the productivity, creativity and commitment of the workforce while meeting the needs of diverse consumer groups. Affirmative action is tied together with valuing and/or managing diversity, diversity often becomes tainted by negative perceptions of affirmative action and is therefore frequently misunderstood. Affirmative action and diversity are both measures that are taken with the aim of encouraging corporations to hire and promote workers from diverse backgrounds. Both diversity and affirmative action focus on eliminating discrimination in hiring minorities including women, differently abled individuals, and other groups of minorities that suffers from discrimination in the workplace. However, the manner in which each initiative is carried out is quite distinct to one another.

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