Volume: II, Issue: I

ISSN: 2581-5830

GAP GYAN - *An International Peer-Open Access Journal of Social*

MORE THAN JUST DIVERSITY, HUMAN RESOURCE MUST DEVELOP A CULTURAL COMPETENCE : GIANT ROLE HR

Dr. Parulkumari P Bhati

Member GAP NGO

Abstract

During the past two decades, cultural diversity in workplaces and organizations has become an international challenge. Much like the personality of a person that is shaped and molded by parents, relatives, and friends, the personality of an organization is molded and shaped by the founders, board members, and the experiences of each and every employee. When the society employs personnel from different countries, this one must obey to the restrictions coherent to the cultural differences. Diversity in the workplace also gives companies the opportunity to ensure a head start on identifying new trends by having a workforce which is representative of its customers and it acts as a key motivating factor for staff, reducing absenteeism and low productivity levels by creating an inclusive environment that values diversity. HR has an important part to play in fostering and promoting diversity. Its key role in diversity management and leadership is to create and empower an organizational culture that fosters a respectful, inclusive environment where each employee has the opportunity to learn, grow and contribute to the organization's success.HR has to create such a positive and strong cultural where cultural competency exist. Cultural competence is important because it encourages further collaboration between employees, which unlocks the full business value of having a diverse staff.

This paper aims to handle some of the issues pertaining to human resource practices with respect to multiculturalism that contribute towards the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations and shows the big role of HR to develop culture competence in organization. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by the trainers/HR during this intervention and proposes a set of principles for the development of effective cultural competence.

Keywords : Culture, Diversity, Cultural competence, Leadership, cultural competence assessment tool, Intervention

INTRODUCTION

HR and TA experts will have to develop and grow in the area of cultural competency. Current buzzwords such as diversity and inclusion, will become statements of fact and become the norm in that near future for any organization. To ensure competitive advantage HR and TA professionals need to be aware of the new cultural dynamics and become competent in the cultural diversity of the workforce of the future. The multiculturalism in Indian firms may lead to substantial benefits, including increased creativity, improved decision making, and broader markets for products. However, more cultural diversity also may pose important challenges for these firms, whether or not they have multinational operations. For instance, as cultural diversity increases, firms may need to develop new strategies for managing and motivating their employees. Other cultural values create interactions with high potential for conflict, misunderstanding, poor performance,

https://www.gapjournals.org/

and ultimately, individual and organizational ineffectiveness or failure. Such problems are influencing HR practices in many organizations. This paper aims to handle some of the issues pertaining to human resource practices with respect to multiculturalism

that contribute towards the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations and the performance and well-being of their members.

What is cultural competency?

According to the Business Dictionary, it is A set of behaviors, policies, and attitudes which form a system or agency which allows cross-cultural groups to effectively work professionally in situations. This includes human behaviors, languages, communications, actions, values, religious beliefs, social groups, and ethic perceptions. Individuals are competent to function on their own and within an organization where multi-cultural situationwillbe present.

The fact is, if your organization is not culturally diverse today, it will certainly be in the years to come. Research indicates that countries with a high influx of immigrant workers show growth in their available workforce, whereas countries with no immigrant influx population are seeing a decline in available workforce population.

How do you practice cultural competency?

Culture that fosters relationships across the organization. HR and TA professionals will play a pivotal role in ensuring the organizational success of such relationships. They will also need to learn about the cultural nuances that apply to different cultures, and lead by example.HR professionals, also need to demonstrate our willingness to learn and appreciate what, the diversity of culture brings to any organization.

Relationships across the organization spanning cultures are the essential tool needed to reduce stereotypes and preconceived notions.Another aspect of the practical application of cultural competency is to understand the current cultural norms associated with the various individuals in your workforce.There's a diversity of facets to diversity training. But in our increasingly global and mobile world, one of the most important is cultural competence. More than ever before, people are likely to work daily with people from other cultures.But cultural competence can be one of the most challenging skills to learn. That's because you're dealing with thousands of cultures that have developed over thousands of years, with infinite shades of gray within them.

THE 7 ESSENTIALS FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCE

1. Beliefs and Worldview – people have fundamentally different ways of seeing the world, and their role in it. In the West, people tend to believe they're in charge of their fate. But most other cultures are more fatalistic: either it's meant to be – or not – which has significant impact on multicultural teams.

2. Communication Styles -different people have wildly different ways of communication, especially regarding
context and directness. In North America, people tend to say what they mean. But in most other cultures, people are more indirect, which can seem confusing or even misleading.

3. Formality – cultures differ greatly in greetings, manners and etiquette. In the United States, people tend to be casual, both in dress and behavior. But in most other cultures, formality is more valued, and is an essential sign of respect.

4. Hierarchy – cultures differ in whether their societies are horizontal or vertical. In the West, people are generally seen as equals. But in Asian, Latin, and Middle Eastern cultures, there is much more emphasis on – and comfort with – hierarchy and strong leadership concentrated at the top.

5. Perceptions of Time – in addition to diverse religious and cultural events, people differ greatly in their perceptions of time. Americans tend to be short-term and fixed: deadlines are deadlines. But in many other cultures, people tend to think more long-term, and dates and deadlines are more flexible.

https://www.gapjournals.org/

6. Values and Priorities – in North America, there is greater emphasis on the individual and career, and less loyalty between employer and employee. But in Asian and Latin cultures, there is greater emphasis on the group, and long-term business and work relationships.

7. Everyone's Unique – finally, it's important to remember that cultural guidelines are only that – guidelines. Every person is as unique as their singular fingerprints, and it's important to perceive the individual.

Cultural competence is non-threatening because it acknowledges and validates who people are. By focusing on the organization's culture, it removes the need to place blame and assume guilt. Since becoming culturally competent focuses on the "how-to" of aligning policies and practices with goals, everyone is involved in the process. This
"inside-out" model relieves the outsiders (or excluded groups) from the responsibility of doing all the adapting.

A CULTURAL COMPETENCE MODEL: 5 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

1. Valuing diversity

Valuing diversity means accepting and respecting differences between and within cultures. We often presume that a common culture is shared between members of racial, linguistic, and religious groups, but this may not be true. A group might share historical and geographical experiences, but individuals may share only physical appearance, language, or spiritual beliefs. Our cultural assumptions can lead us to wrong conclusions. As people move to new areas and meld with other cultures it creates a kaleidoscope of subcultures within racial groups. Gender, locale, and socioeconomic status can sometimes be more powerful than racial factors. For example, a Vietnamese couple may immigrate to America, and raise their children in a suburban area. As a result, the children may identify much more with European American popular culture than the Vietnamese culture of their parents. Understanding situations such as this can lead to a better understanding of the complexity of diversity.

2. Conducting cultural self-assessment

The most important actions to be conscious of are usually the ones we take for granted. For instance, physical distance during social interactions varies by culture. If a staff member of an organization routinely touches the arm of whomever she is talking to, this might be misread in some cultures. Such miscommunication can be avoided if the organization does cultural self-assessment. Each organization has a culture. Surveys and discussion can help members become more aware of the organization's way of doing things and can help it adjust to other cultures. This assessment is a continuing process towards cultural competence.

3. Understanding the dynamics of difference

Many factors can affect cross-cultural interactions. Bias due to historical cultural experiences can explain some current attitudes. For example, Native Americans and African Americans, among other groups, have experienced discrimination and unfair treatment from dominant cultures. Mistrust coming out of these experiences may be passed on to the next generations of these groups, but ignored within the dominant culture. An oppressed group may feel mistrust toward the dominant culture, but members of the dominant culture may be unaware of it or not understand it. Organizations planning to interact with varying cultures need awareness of such a dynamic if they want to be effective. Remember that organizations can be intergenerational. A group that worked with an ineffective, culturally incompetent organization 15 years ago, may not know that the group has the same name but is in a "second life" -- a new staff, a new board, and a new approach to working with the community. This means the organization has some work to do, and must be aware of this dynamic in order to be newly effective. Being proactive rather than reactive about change produces a synergistic organization. Anticipating change is a basic dynamic in the development of synergy. Synergy is more than just teamwork. It's the magic that happens when people are truly working together, understanding one another deeply, and in total agreement about their beliefs and goals, at least as far as their work goes. Synergy happens only if people treat each other with respect and effectively communicate with each other.

https://www.gapjournals.org/

4. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge

Cultural knowledge should be integrated into every facet of an organization. Staff must be trained and be able to effectively utilize knowledge gained. Policies should be responsive to cultural diversity. Program materials should reflect positive images of all cultures.

5. Adapting to diversity

Values, behaviors, attitudes, practices, policies, and structures that make it possible for cross-cultural communication guide a culturally competent organization. When you recognize, respect, and value all cultures and integrate those values into the system, culturally competent organizations can meet the needs of diverse groups.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF DIVERSITY IN AN ORGANIZATION?

There are all types of diversity in an organization. However, some types of diversity have a larger impact on organizations than others because they have historical significance. These types of diversity are associated with a history of inequity and injustice where not every person or group has been treated equally because of them. These types of diversity include:

Marginalized or socially excluded groups
Nationality
Ethnicity
Native language
Race
Gender
Sexual orientation
Social class
Spiritual beliefs and practice
Physical and mental ability

Other types of diversity that should be considered, but tend to be less salient include:

Age
Educational status
Family status
Health status
Style
Skills and talents
Customs
Ideas
Military experience
National, regional, or other geographical area
Ownership of property
Occupational status
Socioeconomic status

ROLE OF HR TO DEVELOP A CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Diversity is reality. We are all connected through the increasing globalization of communications, trade, and labor practices. Changes in one part of the world affect people everywhere. Considering our increasing diversity and

https://www.gapjournals.org/

interconnected problems, working together seems to be the best strategy for accomplishing our goals. Because social and economic change is coming faster and faster, organizations are understanding the need for cultural competence. We're realizing that if we don't improve our skills we're asking for organizational and cultural gridlock.
Studies show that new entrants to the workforce and communities increasingly will be people of color, immigrants, and white women because of differential birth rates and immigration patterns.

There are many benefits to diversity, such as the rich resource of alternative ideas for how to do things, the opportunity for contact with people from all cultures and nationalities that are living in your community, the aid in strategizing quick response to environmental change, and a source for hope and success in managing our work and survival.

Benefits of building an organization's cultural competence are:

Increases respect and mutual understanding among those involved.
Increases creativity in problem-solving through new perspectives, ideas, and strategies.
Decreases unwanted surprises that might slow progress.
Increases participation and involvement of other cultural groups.
Increases trust and cooperation.
Helps overcome fear of mistakes, competition, or conflict. For instance, by understanding and accepting many cultures, everyone is more likely to feel more comfortable in general and less likely to feel the urge to look over their shoulders to be sure they are being "appropriate" in majority terms.
Promotes inclusion and equality.

When does an organization need to become culturally competent?

An organization needs to become culturally competent when there is a problem or crisis, a shared vision, and a desired outcome.

An organization is ready to become culturally competent when groups and potential leaders that will be collaborating have been identified, the needs of the cultural groups are identified, the organization knows what was done before and how it affected the groups involved, and the organization is open to learning and adapting to better fit current needs.

HOW DO HR CREATE A CULTURALLY COMPETENT ORGANIZATION?

Indicators of cultural competence:

Recognizing the power and influence of culture
Understanding how each of our backgrounds affects our responses to others
Not assuming that all members of cultural groups share the same beliefs and practices
Acknowledging how past experiences affect present interactions
Building on the strengths and resources of each culture in an organization
Allocating resources for leadership and staff development in the area of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding
Actively eliminating prejudice in policies and practices
Willing to share power among leaders of different cultural backgrounds
Evaluating the organization's cultural competence on a regular basis

Cultural differences can either help or hurt the way an organization functions. Creating multicultural organizations makes us deal with differences and use them to strengthen our efforts. To reach these goals you need a plan for action.

https://www.gapjournals.org/

Action steps for achieving cultural competence:

If achieving cultural competence is a top-down organizational mandate, some would say it's less likely to happen. But support from the top should be part of it. Getting everyone to "buy in" can be aided with a committee representing all levels in an organization. Such a committee can establish and facilitate the following action steps. If people at all organizational levels are involved more people are likely to be influenced to become more culturally competent. But, the process can be complicated by the fact that some people don't want to be more culturally sensitive or don't understand why the issue is important; be mindful of these realities as the process ensues.

Develop support for change throughout the organization (who wants change and who doesn't?)
Identify the cultural groups to be involved (who needs to be involved in the planning, implementation, and reinforcement of the change?)
Identify barriers to working with the organization (what is currently not working? What will stop you or slow you down?)
Assess your current level of cultural competence (what knowledge, skills, and resources can you build on? Where are the gaps?)
Identify the resource needed (how much funding is required to bring about the change? Where can you find the resources?)
Develop goals and implementation steps and deadlines for achieving them (who can do what, when, and how?).
Commit to an ongoing evaluation of progress (measuring outcomes) and be willing to respond to change (what does progress and success look like? What are the signs that will tell you that the organization is on the right track?).

How to manage the dynamics of building culturally competent organizations:

VISION AND CONTEXT

It can take time and effort for groups with historically negative relationships to trust each other and begin to work together effectively. A common problem is cultural dominance and insensitivity. Frequently, people of color find that when they are in the minority in an organization, they are asked to teach others about their culture, or to explain racism and oppression -- rather than everyone taking an active part in educating themselves. In organizations where white people are the majority, people of color may be expected to conform to white standards and to be bicultural and bilingual. This accommodation takes enormous energy to sustain. Members of a culturally competent organization do not approach fellow members with stereotypical attitudes or generalize about an entire people based on an experience of one person. Involve and include people from all cultures in the process of developing a vision for the organization.

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH

Include diverse groups of people from your community at the organization's inception. This can ensure that your organization's development reflects many perspectives. It can also minimize real or perceived tokenism, paternalism, and inequality among the people who join later. Recognize that changing the appearance of your membership is only the first step in understanding and respecting all cultures. Develop and use ground rules that establish shared norms, reinforce constructive and respectful conduct, and protect against damaging behavior. Encourage and help people to develop qualities such as patience, empathy, trust, tolerance, and a nonjudgmental attitude.

DIVERSITY TRAINING

https://www.gapjournals.org/

Become aware of the cultural diversity of the organization. Try to understand all its dimensions and seek the commitment of those involved to nurture cultural diversity. Address the myths, stereotypes, and cultural differences that interfere with the full contribution of members.

Diversity trainings are typically one-time events. These trainings alone will not change a staff person's behavior or an organization's practices. It is important to have other strategies that will reinforce and sustain behavioral and policy changes.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

Share the work and share the power. Create systems that ensure equity in voice, responsibility, and visibility for all groups. The usual hierarchy with a group or leader in charge may create a power inequity, so create a decision-making structure in which all cultural groups have a voice at all levels. Find ways to involve everyone using different kinds of meetings, such as dialogue by phone, mail, or e-mail. Structure equal time for different groups to speak at meetings. Develop operational policies and programs that confront and challenge racism, sexism, and other forms of intolerance. Conduct criticism/self-criticism of meetings to build a common set of expectations, values, and operating methods.

COMMUNICATING

Communication is the basic tool that the organization can use to unite people. Use inclusive and valuing language and quote diverse sources. Learn and apply the cultural etiquette of your members. Learn to read different nonverbal behaviors. Do not assume common understanding and knowledge of unwritten rules. Prohibit disrespectful name -calling and use of stereotypes. Respect and use personal names. Use humor appropriately -- laugh with each other, not at each other. If humor strikes a sour note, the person bothered should make their feelings known.

Learn to listen for what is being said, and not what you want to hear. Invite others to be part of the discussion. Do not misjudge people because of their accent or grammar. Test for understanding by asking questions to be certain you understand the message. Adapt your communication style to fit the situation -- conflicts sometimes arise simply because of the style of a communication rather than its content.

CONCLUSION:

Building culturally competent organizations means changing how people think about other cultures, how they communicate, and how they operate. It means that the structure, leadership, and activities of an organization must reflect many values, perspectives, styles, and priorities. Changing how an organization looks is only the first step. A culturally competent organization also emphasizes the advantages of cultural diversity, celebrates the contributions of each culture, encourages the positive outcomes of interacting with many cultures, and supports the sharing of power among people from different cultures. To really change, an organization has to commit to continuing programming, evaluation, and the creation of a place that is inclusive of all cultures and celebrates diversity.

REFERENCES:

Blommaert, J. and J. Verschueren (1998). Debating Diversity: Analysing the Discourse Crockett, Joan. "Diversity as a Business Strategy." Management Review, May 1999, 62. Devoe,
Deborah. (1999). Managing a diverse workforce. San Mateo, CA: InfoWorld Media Group. Digh, Patricia. "Coming to Terms with Diversity." HR Magazine 43, no. 12 (November 1998): 117-20.
Ashton 2010, the dimensions of diversity. 18 May 2010. Ashton Fourie: Blog. http://ashtonfourie.com/blog1/2010/05/18/the-dimensions-of-diversity/ (Accessed on 5 November 2012)
Diversity in the Workplace: Benefits, Challenges, and the Required Managerial Tools (http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/HR/HR02200.pdf) University if Florida IFAS Extension (Accessed on 24 February 2013)
O' Hagan K. (2001) *Cultural Competence in the caring professions*. Jessica Kingsley, London.
Papadopoulos I. & Lees S. (2002) Developing culturally competent researchers. *Journal of Advanced*

https://www.gapjournals.org/

Nursing 3, 258-264.

Purnell L. &Paulanka B. (2003) *Transcultural Health Care: A Culturally Competent Approach*. 2nd Ed. F.A. Davies, Philadelphia