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Managing Cross Cultures: The Predicament and Combating Strategies

DR. P. VAIJAYANTHI[1], O.S.S. SARADA RASAGNYA[2] AND G. SRIVIDHYA IYER[3]

ABSTRACT

The landscape of international business and particularly International Human Resource Management has fundamentally changed with the expansion of augmented mobility of self-initiated expatriates and skilled migrants. Along with this, it has become increasingly imperative to bring in cultural differences and social interactions between workgroups in organizations and coordinate intra-firm progressions in organizations, such as recruiting and retaining workers, to leverage the probable gains from cross-cultural diversity. Diversity management involves the tactical adjustment of workforce heterogeneity to take in and cherish each employee at par on the foundation of their miscellaneous characteristics, so as to leverage organizational multiplicity, enabling enhanced organizational justice and maximized business sequels. Though it is conventional for an organisation's culture, constructed over time, to give way to slow change, the international setting makes it far more inevitable to understand the complex norms and dynamic nature of diverse cultural groups. This felt the need for greater awareness for accommodating and managing culturally and linguistically diverse workers has impelled global managers to evolve cross-cultural strategies, both in the domestic and international context. This paper provides a multilevel critical assessment of cross-cultural diversity management in trying to understand the culture at the employee, organizational, and national contexts. By examining universal, ethnocentric (culture-specific), and polycentric cross-cultural models, differences between the Western and East Asian cultural norms have been assessed. The insights highlighted in this paper may help to bridge the cultural distance between diverse groups and individuals from different cultures, and pave the basis for successful management and work in diversified cultures. The study underlines that organizations take appropriate diversity management measures to bind and leverage the ability of diverse employees for maximized competitive advantage.

Keywords: *Cross-culture, Diversity management, Hofstede's interpretation, Expatriates, International HRM*

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[1] Author is a Professor at Sastra University, India.
[2] Author is a student at Sastra University, India.
[3] Author is a student at Sastra University, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity, though the term has defined meaning in itself, there are different interpretations and functions under the umbrella of this term. Since the 1960s, when the attention turned towards the value of labour relations, cultures were the centre of appeal. Several organizations and companies had focused on developing their human resources management when notions like motivation, encouragement, and organizational behaviour began to come into the spotlight.

Every organization's main aim would be to have peaceful and efficient employment, in order to have better recruitment, staffing, promotion, organizational relations, and a better workforce with production. The very first thing to be concentrated on while getting people together as a group is to make sure that they go with each other's frequency for peaceful progress. The notion that comes forward while working together is cultural diversity. *Cultural Diversity* - the term in itself is indicative of *Unity in Diversity*. This article would be dealing with cultural diversity in the workplace.

What is culture? And why do we recognize culture? Is Culture a medium or rather a lens through which we identify a person to be someone belonging to one particular state, caste, religion or place? It is a notion people follow for some obvious reason. They make it their identity; people tend to exist as groups or communities who are bound together by one culture. Culture as a whole becomes the criteria for recognizing or evaluating a person, especially at the workplace.

Culture is a source through which we examine and analyse the way of living of another person as correct, wrong, normal, abnormal, good, or bad. At times it reaches an extent where people start judging and discriminating against each other.

Hofstede (1986), defines culture as the process of programming the intellect. It enables one to differentiate one cluster from the other. Mind refers to thoughts, emotions, acting with a corollary to behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. Culture is a component of value systems. Culture is associated with nations or regional groups or ethnic entities within or outside the country.

Kroeber and Kluckholn (1952), state that culture includes repetitive sequence, overt and inherent, of and for behaviour, attained and conveyed by symbols, comprising remarkable achievement of human groups, inclusive of their incarnation in artefacts, the essence of culture constitutes of traditional ideas and specifically their fastened values, culture systems and on the other hand be considered as action's output, as conditioning features of future action.

Cowen (2002), opines that culture includes art forms, activities, artefacts and other products that amuse and kindle individuals that is music, literature, visual arts and cinema. Population use their culture to create novel products, making culture a commercial brand. Culture is not firm. It is a process that progressively grows via interaction. Culture enables man to create a social setting by giving them provisions of how people exist with each other and together by abiding by social and cultural codes that differentiate them from other cultures.

What is diversity? And why diversity? Why can't everyone agree or accept a common, when they work in the same organisation. People at times feel proud representing their culture, whereas, sometimes they feel inferior, assuming it is obstructing their modernisation. At times people also experience culture shock when they come to a place or situation where they are introduced to a new culture, and become disoriented.

Cultural diversity can be input in terms, of the existence of various ethnic groups at the same place or a society, and diversity is a composition of different cultures. This also includes population differences within a community based on age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, gender, religion, and race. Every organisation should adopt cultural diversity as an essential part. This has a large impact on the employees and the efficiency they work with. Every individual strives for social acceptance. This also includes cultural diversity where the person is being accepted for what he is. It motivates him, and the same has an impact on his efficiency of work. Acceptance is complimentary between an individual and an organisation, they are positively correlated.

Cultural diversity also includes cultural adaptability, that is whether a person is or will be able to adapt to an organisation's existing culture. Whether the individual will be able to cope with the team? There are some factors of cultural diversity that affect the communication and efficiency of work.

II. GLOBALISATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The main cause of cultural diversity is globalisation. Globalisation has three dimensions

1) *Economic globalisation* -Tremendous growth is being noted in cross trade, foreign capital flow, and digitalization now. Thus, countries rely on each other for the same and this is called Economic globalization.

2) *Cultural globalisation* -Social relations are expanded by way of the flow of thoughts, values, meaning. This brings in synergy between people and cultures. This is called cultural globalization.

> 3) ***Political globalisation*** –The degree of cooperation between sovereigns is called political globalization. This is promoted by global organizations.

Globalisation involves exposure at a macro level where there is an exchange of ideas and values to a large extent. What one sign means in one country does not mean the same in another. Exchange and trade have been existing since earlier times; back then people did not concentrate much on the exchange of culture. During the historic periods, there was not much prevalence of communication and transportation. But with the boom in the industrial revolution communication and transportation expanded. This enabled one to export and import cultural products. From the 18th century, cultures were standardized and this became irreversible. Nation-states came up and guarded their culture against peripheral manipulation. However, with time communication media came up such as the printing press, media, cinema and later communication technology which brought more exposure and exchange of the local as well as national culture, so this paved way for the rapid circulation of culture. This relation between globalisation and culture is not a new phenomenon. It has been existing for ages and few theories scrutinize this interaction.

III. THE 3H MODEL OF CROSS-CULTURE MANAGEMENT

Heterogenization Scenario

This school of thought has a point of view that globalization engenders a shape of heterogeneity which refers to a complex structure in which nodes tend to associate with each other with regard to firm cultural aspects. There can be two discrete variants of heterogenization that is one at the local level which denotes a situation where the practices of a circle of life in a specific milieu become more varied over a period of time. The heterogenization at a trans-local level refers to a situation where the practices of a circle of life in at least two milieus become more diverse over a period of time. Heterogenization has also been marked as demarcation, which relates essentially to impediments that prevent flows that would contribute to making cultures appear comparable.

Heterogenization embodies a procedure that leads to a more inwardly appearing world due to the escalation of flows across cultures. Local cultures suffer perpetual renovation and reinvention due to the influence of global factors and forces. Cultures don't remain impervious by global flows and globalisation in general, but the crux of the culture remains intact and genuine.

Cultural groups progress into heterogonous entities due to variances in demands required by their milieu in attempts to adapt to the necessities of the latter. Subsequently, over a period of

time, these groups become diversified and very distinctive due to environmental conditions and pressures. As per this school of thought, it looks like the cultural differentiation will most likely remain sturdy despite globalization forces. What will probably change are the criteria used by various cultural groups to describe their identity and differentiation regarding other cultures.

Homogenization Scenario

The developed interconnection between countries and cultures adds to form a more homogenous world. Across countries and regions in the world, people seem to watch the same entertainment programs, listen to the same music, utilize common global brand products and services, and wear similar clothes. The school of thought of the homogenization scenario has a point of view that the concept of globalization has derived its existence from western or American tradition. So it's a replica of their culture. Western countries tend to exchange their culture with other countries and reinforce their culture, so this results in a scenario where other countries adopt their culture and disown their culture under the umbrella of globalisation. This school also identifies the existence of people who don't have their own culture but adapt themselves to global culture. Globalisation contributes to demolishing local culture, traditions and practices, thinning, even eliminating the exclusivity of national cultures, and establishing a homogenized world culture.

Hybridization Scenario

Globalization explains the scenario where the world's cultures blend together while creating innovative and treasured heterogeneous significance as well as culturally compelled macro insights (Featherstone, 1990). The chief thesis of cultural hybridization is the unceasing process of blending cultures. The latter ensuing from the globalization of finales, derived out of the assimilation of both the international and local (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997) and of the novel, distinctive and hybrid cultures which are basically neither global nor local at their core (Ritzer, 2010). As for Robertson (2001), globalization is a complex blend of homogenization and heterogenization as contrasting to a wide-ranging process of homogenization.

The school of thought of hybridization takes in that knowledge that is marginalized and contemplated taboo and joins them with the principles of nationalism, challenging those taboos taking them beyond national borders. The process of merging cultures and national components will demoralize ethnicity because the nature of the combining process will instigate from the experiences prompted and acquired across territorial boundaries.

The hybridization view has a perception that globalization embodies a procedure of both distinction and interconnection. Hence the world cannot be stamped as a static grid spreading

worldwide but it's rather an assortment of socio-techno-cultural environments. The final view of the hybridization concept is that the superficial features of a culture are actually being blended together and on the controversial side the deep-rooted and intrinsic aspects of a culture are not subject to melding. Though people travel beyond borders and culture extends across borders the underlying roots, assumptions, and beliefs remain safe on the adjacent side and the global culture goes on as well. The marginal constituents of culture traverse beyond borders and athwart national cultures.

The impact and shift, doesn't mean cultural calibration or merging towards a world culture model based on American or the European one. The unsophisticated idea of homogenization and convergence have been rejected as there is experiential evidence that ropes the verity that globalization conserves federal peculiarities (Guillen, 2001, Zelizer, 1999). This would even enhance and maintain the variety and complexity, cultural diversity of the nation and this also makes sure that the cultural diversity of a nation is endangered. In this process, nations will involve with each other more frequently on regular basis without losing their cultural peculiarities.

The 3H scenario in overall view represents all the ideas of different scenarios of cultural diversity at a global level and a better view of globalization with cultural diversity. In this context there arises a question of whether the people in an organization are fitting in the culture or they are adopting that culture. Cultural fit and cultural adaptability are twins with differences.

IV. CROSS-CULTURAL DIVERSITY - THE PREDICAMENT

Miscommunication may occur frequently; employees may fail to understand each other when they are from difficult culture. Firms that carry out work in a multilingual atmosphere find it difficult to connect with the native employees since these employees speak a different language. Confusion, ambiguity and toughness tend to go up with multiplicity. Overgeneralization of organizational activities by the executives and employees makes it difficult to deal with diversity. Reaching a consensus is hindered due to cultural diversity. The organizational structure gets complicated with increased cultural diversity.

V. MANAGING DIVERSITY – STRATEGIES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Reshaping Culture

The process of cultural alignment can be termed as a never-ending concept, the more people come in, more cultures come together and the scope of cultural diversity goes wide. Diversity

at the workplace is a reality in today's scenario when firms move from the domestic to international/ multinational level. Working and managing strategies also change from domestic to global level. So cultural diversity is a part and parcel of managing strategies of an organization, it affects and also supports an organization's overall strategies at a global level. While thinking of a competitive edge the impact and significance of dealing with cultural diversity have become vital for building advantage.

Companies should also consider their stakeholder's viewpoints that are of shareholders, public agencies, government regulators in sculpting the culture of performance and impending diverse markets. In a number of situations employees, customers and stakeholders in the service environment intermingle to produce the eventual service output (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). An organization should be of such a type where a diverse body of employees, customers and stakeholders are valued and integrated into all dimensions of the work. "Companies look for people who are distinct from us because the diverse workforce may bring different talents, interests, and viewpoints" (Simmons, 1996). The main concentration of organizations should be on universal strategies that will address wider human resource distresses, and appreciate diverse employees.

In the process of reshaping culture, to resolve the issues of unjust, prejudicial dealing of different people, both as employees, customers and managers should distinguish that such a treatment is certain with administrative structure, partiality and absurdity, incongruous policies and practices, improper enforcement of human resources and customer retaining policies and practices, incompetent and unproductive managers. In this manner, companies can craft constituent capitalized workers by instituting mutual belief and esteem among employees, customers and stakeholders (Fernandez, 1998).

The organization's way should be revamped so that they would be able to tap into a wide array of ideas. This will give a new dimension as to how work gets done and the market area also gets expanded. The organization should update itself with its vision, mission, the means to achieve the same, the organization's way, culture, stakeholder relationship, market base, tool availability to the employees.

Cultural Fit and Cultural Adaptability

People often tend not to reflect their beliefs and values which are important to them in their behaviour. As per the Harvard Business Review, the dispersion range of culture is large between the employees. The recruitment process of an organization has a lot of criteria that the employee has to satisfy to get employed. In this context, the recruitment panel or the manager

concentrates on whether he reflects the norms, values, and behaviour of the institution presently. As mentioned above cultural fit and cultural adaptability are twins with differences. Cultural fit is a context where the organization is searching for those qualities of an individual which would fit the currently existing culture of the organization. They don't focus on who does not have those values but will adapt the organizational culture. The aptitude of sticking to organizational culture is called cultural adaptability. The recruitment process should often search for people with determination to do anything for the organization rather than searching for the person who would fit the culture. Cultural fit and cultural adaptability influence and affect the performance of the individual. The person who is already fit in the culture would have a consistent performance but not a growing performance which may bring a stale output. Humans change over time. So a person with cultural adaptability would be more apt for any position rather than a person with a cultural fit.

The impact of cultural fit and its adaptability on employee's performance has been examined by contrasting linguistic styles portrayed in mails sent. The frequency of using swears words or a personal pronoun by an employee towards his fellow workers depends on the culture prevailing between the peers. It was observed that cultural fit was directly proportional to fair appraisal, promotion, and bonuses. The employees who could quickly adapt to culture were better at the workplace than the employees who had a greater amount of cultural fit. Cultural adaptors are more suitable for a dynamic atmosphere.

VI. CONCLUSION

Implications for Practice

Cultural diversity can be managed in three ways: Firstly, cultural diversity should be considered irrelevant. Organizations that give more weightage to one's culture avoid conflicts arising out of diversity by minimizing it. The organization either selects homogenous people or socializes all of them into one dominant culture. They have managing strategies and they train their employees as to how to manage cultural diversities. They create a competitive edge by emphasizing cultural diversity to their employees. To cope with diversity the organization can host linguistic programs, cultural orientations, assimilations etc. Organizations should also learn to value and utilize diversity. They can emerge out to be successful in dealing with diversity if the executives assist its initiation and management. The organization has to carry out an audit, access its ground reality, set performance levels, and have pointers indicating its performance. They shouldn't rely on benchmarking the latest strategies that may backfire. The success of an organization depends on the management of human resources, strategizing its

assets and culture.

Summary

Those organizations which have cultural diversity are able to cope better with globalization to serve a more diverse stakeholder territory in a developing globalized business environment. The employees of such organizations, when tuned to cope, with appropriate diversity management practices, serve successfully to enhance their firm's competitive advantage.

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