A Review of Current Practices in Training for Multiculturalism

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Abstract: Today's business environment demands national as well as international presence. This increases cultural diversity among its workforce. There is diversity in culture, ethnicity, language, gender, experiences, values, attitudes and nationalities, and this diversity is bound to create differences among employees. Therefore, there's a dire need to train the global workforce to accept, value and learn from their cultural cousins, solve issues together and achieve organizational goals. This paper explains the dimensions of culture at workplace and the importance of having a culturally diverse workforce. The paper majorly focuses on the extensive methodology to be followed while implementing an effective multicultural training process in an organization.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, Training, Cross Cultural Training, Diversity, Cultural Diversity.*

Objectives

1. To establish the process that can be implemented by organizations to enhance the effectiveness of training in multiculturalism
2. To review the practices in various companies for training in multiculturalism
3. To recommend the process to be adopted to promote a better training program for multiculturalism

I. INTRODUCTION

A culture is a way of life, of a group of people – the behaviors, beliefs, symbols and values they accept generally without thinking about them and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next about them. As per the English Anthropologist, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, "Culture includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Culture has been described as one of the most powerful and stable forces operating in organizations.

Organizations are a global melting pot wherein people from multiple locations, cultures, backgrounds come and work together (Neo,2015). Diversity does not include just ethnicity, gender, age or religion but it also encompasses different qualities, perceptions, approaches in interactions and other defining characteristics that set us apart from everyone else.

Religion, Ethnic Origins, Language, Generations, etc. form the sources of culture. Additionally, the external factors that define culture include Clothing, Food, Rituals and Festivals (Kulkarni, 2012).

A. Importance of Cultural Diversity Inclusion at Workplace

Cultural Diversity inclusion at workplace makes an impact in the following ways:

a) Leaders are able to maximize and capitalize on the styles, skills and sensibilities of employees from different cultures
b) Strategic activities in business organizations are carried out in teams and therefore knowledge of how cultural diversity effects these work arrangements are vital for managerial decision making.
c) Organizations that practice multiculturalism attract and retain the best talent.
d) Organizations that have the right strategies in place to attract and retain qualified members from different minority groups and are successful in implementing fair career advancements are able to gain competitive advantage (Mazur, 2010)
e) In the extensive global market, a multicultural organization is better suited to serve the diverse clientele (Adler, 1991).
f) "Creativity thrives on diversity" (Morgan, 1989). In research based industries, talented workforce comprising of gender diversity and ethnic diversity becomes a priceless advantage.
g) Multicultural organizations have the ability to utilize multiple perspectives, experiences and interpretations to deal with complex situations.
h) Diversity inclusion leads to flexibility and adaptability not just internally but externally as well. (Kulkarni, 2012).

II. DISCUSSION

Owing to the benefits of inclusion of culture at the workplace, organizations have started taking initiatives to promote and build a global mindset. Initiatives such as global diversity portals sharing stories and tips from people across the globe, celebration of important days of each culture, cluster mentors, support groups and training help in increasing awareness and appreciation of various cultures. Training is one of the most widely utilized and effective initiative taken by organizations to acclimatize new employees from the start. This paper focuses on designing an effective training module for educating employees at all levels aboutcultural inclusion.

A. Importance of training for multiculturalism

As per the '2015 Global Mobility Trends Survey' conducted by Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 77% of the respondents of the 143 companies surveyed believe that international work experiences add a great value to their career. In the age of globalization, having a diverse workforce is inevitable. As a result, employees have different ways of communicating, interpreting communications, taking decisions, strategizing and approaching conflict.

Often in growing organizations, the workplace environment is taken for granted and employers tend to neglect to create a culture of awareness and mutual respect. Thus

training plays a pivotal role in creating a diversity inclusive workforce.

Cultural Diversity Training is a challenging activity that brings employees of diverse ethnicities and culture to collaborate, understand and work together to achieve a common goal. Organizing diversity based training motivates employees as they feel included, accepted and respected for their uniqueness, skills and experiences. Training gives every individual in the organization a chance to appreciate the other's perspective, differences and similarities. It also offers strategies to build trust and cohesion within teams. This helps teams innovate and improve productivity.

Improved employee morale helps manage conflicts effectively and time saved can be spent on achieving organizational goals.When in an organization, employees feel that they are in a space wheretheir contribution helps in achieving their company's goals and that each one is important, their loyalty quotient towards the organization also improves significantly. The organization having a diverse workforce and that supports its development, reduces absenteeism and retention in turn reducing recruitment process costs (Glover 1995). Thus an investing in a good and effective Cultural Diversity Training is an activity that can be save costs.Lastly,cross- cultural training focuses on developing a Global mindset. This is possible when lateral and vertical knowledge sharing is encouraged and communication is effective.

B. Training Needs Assessment

Training needs assessment is essentially a process that entails gathering information to elicit what are the training needs(Brown 2002). Information such as organization's climate determines what kind of methodology should be adopted to deliver training. The current workforce demographics reveal the cultural mix at the organization. It is essential to understand how everyone perceives employees of different ethnicities at workplace. Assessment needs to be done to judge if employees seem to work well in teams. The organization should be observed to understand if things run smoothly in the organization, if there are any conflicts or controversies, and if there are any problems related to discrimination, racism or any other misunderstanding (Wentling, Palma-Rivas 1997).

Studying recent complaints, disciplinary actions, employee assessments, complaints, exit interviews, recruitment strategies, promotions and safety records illustrates what needs to be incorporated in Cross Cultural diversity training and the appropriate methodology to be used in a training program.

A variety of tools are used to conduct a training needs analysis. These include interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, site visits, document reviews, benchmarking and cultural audits. (Wheeler 1994)

a) *Interviews*help gather information about every individual's perception about the organization and its culture. They need to be conducted for employees at key positions as they have an influence over the organizations climate and their thought process reflects the culture of the organization.

b) *Surveys*are necessary when the organization has many employees, is a global company with offices at various

locations, or there is a time constraint. They are a systematic tool to evaluate an organization's culture.

c) *Focus groups*, comprising a group of 7-10 employees of diverse cultures, religions or ethnicities, are guided discussions that help understand the cultural aspects in an organization.

d) *Site visits* and *Observations*give a clear understanding of the environment prevalent in the organization and allow the assessor to grasp the day-to-day organizational activities, knowledge sharing processes, interactions and diversity of employees.

e) *Document reviews* include reviewing documents regarding hiring, employment, attrition, salary, promotions, complaints, and workforce composition.

f) *Benchmarking* refers to the process in which assessors study the current practices in the market at that point of time. The best practices are adapted and implemented as required.

An assessor may use either of these techniques or a combination of all mentioned above. A Cultural Audit comprises of interviews, document reviews, detailed observations, focus groups and surveys that bring out an in − depth analysis of the organizational culture and its roots.

The entire training needs assessment process also brings about the target audience for the training and what kind of methods should be used.

Once all the needs are identified, objectives of the training program are decided upon. Based on these objects a training program is developed in tandem with the organization's goals. (Brown 2002).

C. What to Include in Training?

On identifying the training needs and stating the objectives of the training, the next step is to list down the content of the training. First determine the broad content of the program which may include awareness, organizational change, interpersonal communication,or a combination of programs (Simons, 1992) and subsequently determine what the training program will focus on i.e. race, culture, religion, ethnicity, experiences, orientation, etc.It is important to formulate a training program which not only has a domestic but also a global focus so as to equip employees for successful international business experiences.

A Cultural Diversity training program should essentially include:

Cross-Cultural Understanding: This program explores all components of culture and communication, including values, beliefs, social structures, perceptions, communication styles, etiquettes, etc. It is the first step into training and understanding of the subject.

Awareness and Understanding: This is the first step that helps familiarize diverse ethnicities, values and cultures we are bound to come across. This type of training promotes participants to celebrate each others' differences be it language, ethnicities, beliefs or value systems, and accept them for who they are(Cobbs, 1994). The training module promotes awareness among people about how their behavior affects work culture. The positive outcome of this module is that employees learn to appreciate their peers' values, beliefs and attitudes.

Stereotypes in Diversity: People tend to formulate irrational assumptions based on culture which automatically leads to biasness. This module addresses issues on how people across diversities are perceived and treated.Sometimes there's intentional or unintentional usage of disrespectful words that may cause misunderstandings. These beliefs endanger the productivity at workplace. The modulethrows light on culture related stereotypical behaviors and how to rectify them.

Valuing Diversity: The module involves educating employees about the importance of having a diverse mix of employees at workplace. It throws light on the utilization of unique experiences, skills, and values each individual brings to the organization.This program should more or less include activities that apply experiences and norms to solve organizational issues.

Intercultural Communication: This module is all about interacting effectively across cultures and will help people avoid misunderstandingsat the workplace. It'll educate participants about what is really being said, body language and non-verbal communication, offensive and disrespectful topics in different cultures, overcoming language barriers and avoiding translation disasters.

It is critical to have a top down approach in this kind of training as leadership levels are instrumental in bringing about change. Moreover, all members of a business unit should undergo training together so that post training everyone has the same amount of knowledge and is able to apply and appreciate it.

D. Techniques to Deliver Training

There are varieties of tools and techniques that can be used to deliver training. Every individual has a different learning sensibility and therefore a combination of different tools should be used such that the knowledge imparted is engraved in the receivers' minds and they stay engaged.

Training employees using *videos* is one of the most effective ways as many learners learn better with the help of audio visuals rather than actually visualizing a scenario. Another advantage of using videos is that it is cost effective and easily available. And last but not the least a large number of audience can be trained using videos (Wheeler, 1994).

Participative exercises such as *simulations* can be effectively used for a group of diverse employees using communication as a main tool and solve tasks using various cultural norms.In *Role plays*, participants are assigned a scenario which is to be enacted out in different social and cultural environments.*Group discussions* give the participants an opportunity to share interesting stories about their respective cultures and ethnicities. This helps build intercultural respect and understanding.

*Case studies*expose participants to real life diversity issues such as racial discriminations wherein they are encouraged to analytically find solutions to the problem at hand and how to handle similar situations.

*Webinars*are self paced one-way lectures that can be delivered via internet. These can be viewed by employees in large numbers and at their own convenience.

Hosting *Theatrical plays* is a fairly new and highly engaging concept for educating employees about multicultural diversity. These plays bring out the problems faced in an organization and their solutions.

E-Learning Modules, Active Listening, Self Reflective Exercises and *Quizzes* are some other frequently used training methods that are used to impart training.

IBM realized the importance of conducting diversity training and how it impacts the company's operations. The organization has globally implemented training sessions that include a variety of diversity-related subjects. The e-learning program, *"Shades of Blue"*, is a learning experience for managers to develop competencies for engaging in business across cultures. Consisting of online learning followed by a two-day face-to-face workshop, the program combines presentations, group discussions, role playing and videos to build understanding and skills for multicultural engagement.

Furthermore, IBM also offers online programs such as *"Quick Views"* and*"Learning Clusters"*that help educate managers on various issues such as diversity, sexual harassment and inclusive leadership. At IBM, it is essential for managers to be given the ability to conduct business with a diverse workforce in a diverse market. This is provided by circulating materials such as simulation models which implies applying what has been learnt, testimonials from IBM executives and self-assessment tools. High Potential candidates are sent for international assignments where this cultural training is put to use.

Yet another initiative at IBM called *Leading@IBM*, for management training includes a dedicated diversity module. In the year 2004, this session conducted at IBM, amounted to nearly 13600 hours, spent on learning and discussion of issues pertaining to diversity at the workplace which included the various markets of IBM.

The IBM managers are encouraged to complete a two day dedicated diversity learning laboratory. For the employees, the company encourages them to attend one-day learning labs. In the year 2004, this initiative amounted to nearly 21169 hours for the IBM Managers and around 5261 for the employees at IBM

Accenture is yet another example of organizations that promote diversity and train employees and management to cater to this at a workplace. They sponsor activities that allow their employees to work across cultures. Training their employees to work across cultures and leverage diversity of multiple cultures is a unique way in which Accenture functions. They aim to provide trainings in the form of e-learning modules, online training, trainings on campus, and a Global Inclusion and Diversity Portal to cater to the same. These trainings also include tips on business etiquettes. Such trainings not only increase the skill base, creativity and innovation among its people but also help achieve better performance.

GlobeSmart is a unique initiative at Accenture that offers 24/7 online access to information pertaining to global business effectiveness. There are other online training programs such as *Online Building Cross-Culture* awareness course which makes the participant aware on how to be able to maximize the value of a multicultural team.

E. Techniques to Evaluate Training

Purpose of training evaluation is to check if the training has had desired effects on the employees, the organizational culture and

the efficiency of business processes in the organization. The results of the evaluation can be further validated by comparing situations before and after the training is delivered. Evaluation also measures the return on investments to the costs incurred in organizing the training (Casse, 1981).

Evaluation of Cross Cultural Training encompasses measuring employees' awareness of characteristics of diverse cultures followed around them, extent to which the trainees apply skills and knowledge imbibed during the diversity training to work in the organization, and what improvements are required to be made to the program to improve outcomes in alignment with the business goals.

Cross Cultural Training Evaluation is often formative in nature and is conducted using tools such as satisfaction surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, observations and studying records to check if any grievances related to cultural discrimination persist.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section attempts to recommend strategies that an organization can adapt to enhance the effectiveness of multiple cultures working together on the same platform. As observed in the existing research papers, the importance of conducting training needsanalysis has been stated. This paper, has taken a step further in stating the methods of training need analysis that can be used for trainings on Multiculturalism and Diversity. It also focuses on the importance of the ways in which trainings are delivered thus suggests the various techniques of delivering a training which can engage the target audience in an organization. The general methodology of evaluating a training program has been to circulate a questionnaire. This paper has attempted to encompass different techniques for evaluation of training, which if implemented in the right combination would yield better results. Also, there is a need to automate the trainings imparted, in the form of e-learning so as to better engage the entire workforce in an organization. These have been elaborately mentioned throughout the review paper.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this paper, the strategies to impart an effective training for multiculturalism have been discussed. In today's business environment which is dynamic in nature, it is important to take the workforce along with the organization. The strategies discussed and recommended in this paper, aim to encompass the various aspects of training in multiculturalism. This would not only enhance the effectiveness of the training but will also keep the employees engaged with the organizations.

Limitations

The focus of this paper is on training for multiculturalism and does not encompass diversity in any other aspect.Although one of the novel and effective ways to educate employees on diverse cultures is through Theatrical plays, may not be a standard process and also turn out to be a costly option. The training methodology suggested here is restricted to be delivered on-the-job but can certainly be converted to an e-learning module.

Scope for further study

The field of cross cultural training has been evolving for the past 50 years and will keep evolving in the future as well. Thus there will be no dearth for futuristic studies in this discipline.

Technology has brought about tools and techniques such as multi-media based training that could be effectively used to impart cross cultural training. Practitioners in various parts of the world are developing cultural assimilators. Study on such advancementswill create awareness among other trainers as well. The scope of further study will be unlimited as intercultural communication and skills will become an integral part of an organization.

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