MANAGING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY: THEORY AND PRACTICE WITHIN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

By

JENNIFER GOSSEN

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ABSTRACT

Today’s modern workplaces consist of various cultures, genders, ages, and ethnicities. This diverse work environment provides opportunities for employers to create and promote organizational strategies that value and manage diversity while limiting barriers and prejudices. This research paper addresses the questions of how to best manage workplace diversity, how diversity affects workplace learning, and the role of organizational leaders and managers in creating and supporting successful diversity initiatives.

Using concepts of adult education and workplace learning, this paper will analyze benefits and opportunities of diversity in the workplace, strategies for creating inclusive environments, and best practices for educating and managing a diverse workforce. This analysis will include an examination of Canada’s best diversity employers as examples of successful diversity initiatives and ideas for incorporating best practices that are applicable and relevant for a Canadian workplace.

For a full examination of managing diversity in the workplace, it is necessary to use an interdisciplinary perspective. By analyzing economic, sociological, managerial, and educational perspectives, this paper integrates an approach that most effectively investigates how diversity affects our world of work, and how to best manage diversity in that world.
Introduction

Today’s workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse due to globalization, internationalization and changing demographics. As borders shrink and populations grow, migration and immigration are causing local, national and international shifts in demographics. Worldwide, people are on the move, and with advanced transportation methods, increased work opportunities and accelerated processing times many people are coming to Canada (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, 2011). Lured by prospects of peace, prosperity or education, people from many parts of the world are immigrating to Canada and starting new lives for themselves and their families.

Increased immigration brings both challenges and opportunities to the Canadian workforce as it strives to integrate and manage diversity. Progressive Canadian companies see the value of a diverse workplace and are working strategically to assimilate immigrants and capitalize on diverse labour markets. These diverse markets are not limited to immigration, but also include demographic differences including gender, age, sexual orientation, and family status among others. While these factors contribute to Canada’s diverse landscape, they also have a great impact on our workplaces. Since we are not a homogenous country or workforce, we must recognize and implement methods to respond to and respect workplace diversity. In fact, in order to remain competitive and profitable in a global market, organizations must incorporate strategies to effectively manage diversity. Diversity specialists and business leaders alike agree that companies seeking success and sustainability in the twenty-first century must take competitive advantage of diverse workforces (Kreitz, 2008). As such, trends in diversity management include organizational strategies to both value and manage diversity while
limiting barriers and prejudices. Diversity initiatives that promote inclusion and authentic leadership have been implemented in many leading organizations, and an increasing number of companies are recognizing the economic, social, educational and managerial benefits of effective diversity management.

For a full examination of managing diversity in the workplace, it is necessary to use an interdisciplinary perspective. By analyzing economic, sociological, managerial, and educational perspectives, we can integrate an approach that most effectively investigates how diversity affects our world of work, and how to best manage diversity in that world. Additionally, it is essential to conduct this analysis by incorporating principles of adult learning theories such as sociocultural, situated, and transformative learning. With such a thorough understanding gleaned from multiple perspectives, it is possible to develop a clear and focused understanding of effective diversity management, including how workplace learning is impacted by diversity, and how managers, leaders and educators can best support diverse learning environments.

Therefore, the goal of this research paper is to address the questions of how to best manage workplace diversity, how diversity affects workplace learning, and the role of organizational leaders and managers in creating and supporting successful diversity initiatives. Using concepts of adult education and workplace learning, this paper will analyze benefits and opportunities of diversity in the workplace, strategies for creating inclusive environments, and best practices for educating and managing a diverse workforce. This analysis will include an examination of Canada’s best diversity employers as examples of successful diversity initiatives and ideas for incorporating best practices that are applicable and relevant for a Canadian workplace.
Diversity in Canada

Diversity has played an important role in Canada’s history. Today, Canada boasts the highest percentage of foreign-born citizens in all G8 countries, and for eight consecutive years has welcomed between 240,000 to 265,000 new permanent residents annually (Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, 2013). Immigrants represent over 20 percent of the total Canadian population, with over 200 ethnic origins reported in the 2011 National Household Survey. And of those 200 ethnic origins, 13 have surpassed the one million population mark (Evans, 2013). This growth in Canada’s population due to immigration has been a great contributor to our emergence as a country respected for our economic, social and cultural achievements (Jedwab, 2016).

According to the Conference Board of Canada, (2015) Canada’s future prosperity depends on its people, including an increasing number of visible minorities whose population is projected to increase much faster than the rest of the population. In fact, demographic projections by Statistics Canada show that the ethnocultural diversity of Canada’s population will increase greatly, reporting that “By 2031, 29% to 32% percent of Canada’s population—between 11.4 and 14.4 million people—could belong to a visible minority group, which is nearly double the proportion (16%) and more than double the number (5.3 million) reported in 2006” (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Beyond visible minorities, an all-inclusive definition of diversity includes the collective mixture of human differences and similarities, including educational background, geographic origin, sexual preference, profession, culture, political affiliation, tenure in an organization, and other socioeconomic, psychographic and ethnic-racial characteristics (Cox, 1993). This inclusive
definition guides much discourse on diversity and diversity initiatives, and will be the definition considered in this paper for examining a diverse workplace, diversity training and diversity management.

In a recent speech to the commissioner and staff at Canada House in London, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau emphasized how Canada and Canadians view diversity by saying: “Canadians understand that diversity is our strength. We know that Canada has succeeded – culturally, politically, economically – because of our diversity, not in spite of it” (Trudeau, 2015). This quote idealizes diversity in Canada, and acknowledges the need to build capacity and strength through diversity and diversity initiatives. These issues of diversity and inclusion are not only on the prime minister’s agenda, but also on the agendas of Canadian employers and employees as they seek to build individual and collective capacity by effectively valuing and managing diversity.

**Workplace Diversity**

Workforce diversity refers to the “composition of work units in terms of the cultural or demographic characteristics that are salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members” (DiTomaso, Post and Parks-Yancy, 2007, p. 1). In Canada, we are seeing increasing variety in the composition of our workplace and the relationships that occur within work groups. As we welcome an increasing number of refugees, permanent residents, and immigrants, the face of the Canadian workforce is changing. According to Statistics Canada (2011), as of 2011, all net labour force growth in Canada came from immigration and by 2017 the number of visible minorities in Canada is expected to double and account for approximately
20% of Canada’s population. In 1991, fewer than one out of every five workers were born outside Canada, but that number is expected to be closer to one in three by 2031 (ibid).

The Conference Board of Canada (2015) states that at a time when the country is facing severe labour shortages in some provinces, and forecasts predict shrinking labour availability as significant numbers of baby boomers begin to retire, it is clear that immigrants will make up an increasing share of Canada’s labour force. The effects of immigration and globalization on Canada’s workforce are profound. Issues such as communicating cross culturally, recognizing foreign credentials and managing diversity must be considered by progressive and engaged workplaces looking to be both socially conscious and economically viable.

Since diversity will increase significantly in the coming years, successful organizations recognize the need for immediate action and are ready and willing to spend resources on managing diversity in the workplace now. According to Forbes Insight (2011):

Today, diversity and inclusion efforts are de rigueur for almost all companies. Executives understand that their companies can’t be successful on a global platform if they don’t have a diverse and inclusive workforce. A diverse and inclusive workforce is necessary to drive innovation, foster creativity, and guide business strategies. Multiple voices lead to new ideas, new services, and new products, and encourage out-of-the-box thinking. Companies no longer view diversity and inclusion efforts as separate from their other business practices, and recognize that a diverse workforce can differentiate them from their competitors and can help capture new clients (p.4).
The concept of workplace diversity is gaining importance in literature and research in economics, sociology, management, and education. Although this topic is often considered as the purview of management research, it is also relevant to interdisciplinary research as benefits and goals of diversity come from a variety of disciplines that can add value to its understanding. For example, in considering workplace diversity from a sociological perspective, we know:

The workplace is a locus of human interaction that touches on all spheres of society, including the way we organize our family life and run our communities. Furthermore, work confers to its members the status of being active participants in the affairs of society, and indeed the social face of being employed is ingrained in the very identity of citizenship (Bouchard, 2006, p. 171).

Integrating perspectives can help us understand the role of diversity in the workplace including how to best manage it, how we learn in diverse environments, and what role leaders and managers play in promoting diversity initiatives.

**Benefits of Workplace Diversity**

In recent years, research has focused on the benefits and opportunities that arise from a diverse workforce. Successful organizations with diverse work teams report that these teams are more effective and produce better financial results as well as better results in innovation (Nelson, 2014). In terms of economic benefits, organizations with a high percentage of women in senior positions realized better returns on equity, results in sales revenue, number of customers and profitability (ibid). Similar results are shown in racially diverse companies; in
fact, organizations with greater racial diversity were also associated with greater sales revenue, a larger number of customers, greater market share, and greater profits (Herring, 2009). From an economic perspective, then, workplace diversity has a great impact on profitability, revenue and productivity.

The Government of Canada also recognizes the economic benefits of diversity including seeing increased immigration as a key factor in supporting Canada’s long-term economic growth while also building strong communities and improving global competitiveness. According to the 2016 Immigration Levels Plan, the contributions that experienced foreign professionals and skilled workers make will result in jobs, innovation, and growth in existing and new industries. Additionally, the Canada Council of Chief Executives (2005) claim that immigrants add to both the quantity and quality of our labour force, and therefore help to increase the competitiveness of Canada’s economy: “Indeed, Canada’s strong flow of immigration from many different countries may provide one of our country’s most important competitive advantages in an increasingly global economy” (Patterson, 2005, p.1). As we know, immigration produces diversity, and it is this variety in culture, education, gender and ethnicity that will promote and enhance business growth in cities and communities across Canada. By examining the economic benefits of diversity in the workplace, we understand the positive impacts that diversity has on the economy and help contextualize diversity’s role in building financial capacity in organizations.

Diversity also spurs innovation and creativity. A diverse work climate has been shown to create a cognitive and social environment that positively supports innovation (Nelson). Building a diverse workforce can also enhance a company’s social competitiveness as “organizations
may gain a competitive advantage in creativity, problem solving, and flexible adaptation to change” (Cox, 1991, p. 54). Latimer (1998) supports this view and also contends that diversity promotes creativity and problem solving. His research showed that diverse groups make better decisions as diversity promotes a robust critical evaluation of solutions and lower levels of risk aversion. In considering diversity from a sociological perspective, it becomes apparent that many of the benefits of a diverse workplace are sociological in nature and can promote inclusivity and acceptance in the workplace.

Since a diverse and inclusive workforce is necessary to drive innovation, foster creativity, and guide business strategies, many organizations are making a business case for diversity that is linked to their innovation strategy (Paterson). Multiple and varied voices have a wide range of experiences, and this can help generate new and innovative ideas about products and services. As a diverse and inclusive workforce brings different and necessary perspectives, innovation strategies can be fueled by diversity (ibid).

In a 2010 HR Council employer survey, 73% of respondents identified ‘enhanced innovation and creativity’ as a benefit of a more diverse workforce, as diverse employees provide fresh perspectives and varying points of view. Research from many sectors, including civil service and nonprofit, supports this and show a strong link between diversity and innovation. Well-managed heterogeneous teams are more productive, more creative and more effective than homogeneous groups:
Diversity can contribute to more effective decision-making and problem-solving by providing a range of perspectives, a broad spectrum of expertise and a more robust process for critical evaluation. Different perspectives can draw attention to shared assumptions that may be implicitly guiding current practices (HR Council).

This perspective shows the positive impact of workplace diversity in creating better business practices and strategies. Companies from various sectors including public, private and nonprofit who recognize and capitalize on the economic, social and managerial benefits of diversity can be confident in creating diversity initiatives to help create inclusive and supportive environments.

**Canadian case studies**

Many Canadian companies are realizing the benefits of a diverse workplace, and for over ten years, employers across Canada have been recognized for exceptional workplace diversity and inclusiveness programs. A competition to recognize Canada’s best diversity employers is held every year and recognizes effective diversity initiatives in a variety of areas including programs for women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, aboriginals, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered/transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) employees (2016, Canada’s Best Diversity Employers). Winning employers are seen as examples of welcoming, inclusive, and accepting workplaces that exemplify leadership and diversity management.

According to the 2016 Canada’s Best Diversity Employers report, Canada’s best diversity employers for 2016 are:
leaders in creating an inclusive environment where individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds are recognized and valued for who they are at work, setting an example not only for Canadian business but also organizations around the world. In reflecting the diversity of the people who make up Canada – including new immigrants, aboriginals, LGBTQ employees and those with disabilities – these organizations also reap the benefits, becoming stronger and more innovative through the addition of fresh voices (p.3).

2016 winners include Rogers Communications Inc. who partnered with an internship program to provide employment to foreign trained professionals, and BC Hydro, which supports managers to hire new Canadians at junior-level positions and provide a career advancement plan to guide their development within the company (ibid). Canada’s best diversity employers can be an example to other employers who are looking to promote diversity and inclusiveness, and attract employees who bring new perspectives and solutions.

Successful Canadian employers, such as those identified as Canada’s best diversity employers, have recognized the need for change in order to be successful in the new world of work, and have adopted measures to do so. Effective measures include: developing diversity plans or strategies, appointing diversity committees, providing workplace accommodations, examining systemic discrimination, cultural competence training, taking a zero-tolerance approach to harassment and discrimination and creating apprenticeship programs for foreign trained professionals (Tatla, 2010). Drawing from economic, sociological and managerial
perspectives, these steps are helping Canadian companies to capitalize on the benefits that diversity brings and to create environments that represent the ideals of a diverse nation.

Workplace learning

In order to further understand how diversity affects our world of work, we must consider the educational importance of workplace learning. The concept of learning at work has grown and expanded over time, with researchers, educators and workers alike recognizing that learning in the workplace is a vital and active practice. Learning involves change, and learning at work is an activity that brings about growth and transformation (Fenwick, 2001). It is also dynamic and active, involving personal and interpersonal connections. To contextualize the practice of learning at work, Cairns and Malloch (2011) suggest we consider the concept of workplace learning by its three terms: work, place, and learning. Work refers to the activities that cross a wide range of social interaction and self-motivated activities. Place includes physical and spiritual locations as well as spaces where we see ourselves as people and learners. And learning is the process of change in an individual or group through activity.

According to Tynjälä (2008), interest in workplace learning has expanded recently due to:

The rapid development of information and communication technology, the growing production of knowledge in the economy, increasing internationalization and globalization as well as changes in occupational structures and in the contents and organization of work have challenged not only educational institutions but also work organization to develop new ways of ensuring that the level of competence of the workforce meets
these challenges. Thus, continuing learning has become important both for individuals operating in the learning society and for organizations competing in international markets (p.131).

Workplace learning can be both formal and informal. Formal learning refers to planned training, including strategic directives, whereas informal workplace learning is embodied and embedded in everyday practices, action and conversation (Fenwick, 2008). This type of learning is treated as a process of change and an expansion of “human possibilities for flexible and creative actions in contexts at work” (ibid p.19). Companies seeking to engage in workplace diversity initiatives must be aware of both formal and informal avenues of workplace education, as both have an impact on workplace culture and learning.

Although learning at work has always been a feature of working, contemporary management literature emphasizes that modern workplace learning includes concepts such as the learning organization (Field, 1995; Senge, 1990) and knowledge worker (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996; Reich, 1991) when considering the ongoing skill development and knowledge production that occur in the workplace. Currently, concepts of diversity and inclusion permeate modern workplace learning discourse, so when examining how we learn at work, consideration must be given to the context of our modern working environment as a foundation for what and how we learn.

In an analysis of workforce education in the midst of globalization, author Lesley Farrell (2001) claims:

for the learning to be useful to the company people must communicate with each other, they must bring their distinctive histories and experiences
to the group, and be prepared to acknowledge, accept and even to elicit, 
the tacit and explicit knowledge of other members of the group in order to 
solve problems (p. 61).

This type of learning is cooperative, social and context-specific. Learning is based on 
sociocultural and situational contexts, and a diverse workplace affords much variety in terms of 
context. In examining successful strategies to manage diversity, there are several adult learning 
theories address the discipline of education in considering the workplace as a site of learning.

**Sociocultural theory**

One concept that helps contextualize workplace learning in a diverse environment is the 
sociocultural theory. This view is drawn from Vygotskian perspectives of learning and 
development and emphasizes that learning occurs within a social world (Alfred, 2002). By 
recognizing the connection between learning, knowledge, and culture, we can examine how 
learning is environmentally based. This environment includes language and symbols as well as 
contextual indicators such as individual, cultural, social, institutional and historical locations. All 
of these are factors in our understanding of workplace learning as a social phenomenon (ibid).

It is through activities, interactions and communicating that contexts are established and 
learning takes place. In the workplace, this involves interactions between and among workers, 
managers, customers and vendors, all of which lead to knowledge. Tynjälä claims: “While the 
organization of work sets the context and conditions for learning, it continues to be the 
reciprocal interaction between the individual and the workplace that determines learning” 
(p.141). Examples of sociocultural learning could involve social activities such as team building, 
pot lucks or group projects where there is meaningful interaction that includes both social and
cultural learning. Colleagues who engage in social activities within a diverse environment can enhance their understandings of themselves and each other as they interact and collaborate in a respectful and inclusive workplace.

Workplaces looking to benefit from diversity must take responsibility for ethical workplace learning in a socioculturally rich context. This involves addressing sociocultural development by exploring culture and diversity as well as helping workers recognize cultural identity and challenge workplace management of that identity (Fenwick, 2001). From an educational perspective, workplace learning must include sociocultural issues and be mindful of the need for new approaches to accommodate and enhance a diverse workforce. Strategies for effective workplace learning include connecting the learner to the social context and viewing learning as a result of the learner interacting with a specific context as well as structural dimensions such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, power and oppression that account for social and cultural factors (Caffarella and Merriam, 2000). This connection between the individual and the workplace forms the basis of sociocultural theory, and in seeking to engage and educate a diverse workforce, attention must be paid to the context and culture of the environment.

For many workplaces, the shift to valuing context and sociocultural perspectives is monumental. However, in reforming workplace practices to adapt to twenty-first century concerns, organizations can create environments that support and develop both individual employees and the organization itself. According to Solomon (2001), the new world of work is more than merely a physical restructuring of work practices, but rather:
By foregrounding culture, these reforms suggest that the workplace is a site that shapes the identity of the employees, that is, the way people think, act, and make decisions. In other words, culture constitutes the patterns of meaning, beliefs and value through which subjects (employees) understand their experience, develop a sense of belonging, and forge their sense of identity (p.42).

Envisioning the workplace as site of not just working, but also identity-building is a key factor in capitalizing on and promoting learning strategies that engage and promote worker’s experiences and identities. This emphasis on the personal and interpersonal in the workplace can be seen as a way of maximizing capacity in the workplace (McIntyre and Solomon, 2000) as sociocultural perspectives are considered and valued in all workplace connections.

**Situated learning**

As mentioned, learning is a phenomenon that is situated in a cultural and social context. In the workplace, this means that how people learn depends on individual characteristics such as intelligence and motivation and also on the social and cultural contexts incorporated in this learning (Tynjälä). The situated learning approach conceived by Lave and Wenger (1991) examines how learning occurs as part of social participation and “being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (ibid p.4). In the workplace, this social theory of learning integrates social participation as a process of learning and knowing and includes components of meaning, practice, community and identity (ibid). These components create a *community of practice*, a concept conceived by Lave and Wenger to explain the interconnectedness of social learning:
“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002, p.4). Communities of practice develop their community and enhance their learning through a variety of activities such as problem solving, seeking experience, building an argument, coordinating and strategizing, and mapping knowledge and identifying gaps (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Modern workplaces looking to integrate and capitalize on diversity understand the socialized nature of learning and seek to build communities of practice in their environments.

Socialization and interaction are necessary for success in a transformative economy. In *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002), Wenger, McDermott and Snyder explain: “The litany of forces transforming our economy – globalization, technological innovation, demographic shifts, and decentralization, among others – has become commonplace and these forces show no sign of abating” (p. 216). The authors stress that communities of practice can help organizations adapt to the new economy in several ways: by leveraging internal and external expertise and relationships to create new business opportunities, by reconstituting expertise and accessing knowledge resources, by creating a sense of identity and belonging and by sharing knowledge resources across traditional boundaries (ibid).

According to Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, the concept of community of practice has found a number of practical applications in business, organizational design, government, education, professional associations, development projects, and civic life. Applications of this practice occur with specialized internal learning communities in business, with knowledge sharing across various levels in government, and with teacher training in education. All of these
peer to peer learning activities are influenced by communities of practice, and in considering the social nature of learning, and the reality of a diverse workplace, organizations must cultivate communities of practice in order to achieve the benefits that diversity can bring.

**Transformative learning**

The transformative learning theory aids our understanding of building knowledge at work by examining how critical reflection and transformation are parts of the adult learning process. As learners, adults have the ability to reflect critically on experiences, integrate this knowledge into existing knowledge structures, and take action on these insights (Collard and Law, 1989). In being critically reflective, learners can achieve the ultimate purpose of transformative learning - to develop more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, better validated, and autonomous perspectives (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). In the process of transformation, adults make sense of their experiences, produce meaning, and find balance. This transformative process can enhance their ability to become self-directed and act on assumptions on which their performance, achievement, and productivity are based (Merriam and Caffarella, 2000).

In a diverse workplace, transformative learning is a process where both individuals and social groups undergo a shift in perspective that leads to an open and reasonable frame of reference (Cranton, 2005; Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow claims that this shift in perspective is the central process of adult development as learners critically reflect on attitudes, ideas and beliefs in their world, and confront realities that are no longer relevant to their world view: “It is critical reflection on habitual ways of knowing and assumptions within one’s world view that is transformative” (Lange, 2013, p 109). An example of a transformative learning experience
would for workers to engage in a rational discourse and critical reflection of a “disorienting dilemma – an unexpected event, person or idea – that a person cannot make sense of within their existing framework” (ibid, p.108). In a diverse work environment, disorienting dilemmas can occur regularly when colleagues, customers and vendors work together but do not completely understand each other. If our own frame of reference limits our ability to make sense of others’ perspectives, then we must engage in conversations and reflection of our own assumptions and biases in order to engage meaningfully with others.

Scholars have expanded on Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning by considering sociocultural contexts and social actions as necessary for change (Collard and Law). Senge asserts that workplace learning encompasses activities taken by an organization to expand its capacity to create its own future, and these activities are grounded on the ability of an organization and its employees to change and become more effective. This commitment to change requires open communication, empowerment and collaboration; therefore, the learning organization has been defined as “an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself” (Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne, 1991).

Since transformative learning theory emphasizes the concept that in becoming critically aware of one’s own assumptions, as well as those of others, new meaning can be created, culturally specific social practices must be considered. In learning, understanding will be enabled by hearing more voices, stories and identities (Sintonen, 2006). By providing space and safety for the inclusion and collaboration of these voices and stories, workplaces can support diversity and enable inclusive environments where both individuals and groups can experience transformative learning.
Diversity management

Diversity management is a strategy used by many organizations seeking to create a working environment that allows employees to reach their full potential as they pursue organizational objectives (Thomas, 1990). This type of management is an ongoing, systemic and planned commitment on the part of the organization to recruit and retain employees with diverse experiences and skills (Basset-Jones, 2005). In recognizing differences in all core business management functions, effective diversity management practices must stem from adult learning theories that contextualize the workplace as both a social and collaborative learning environment while respecting difference and building strength through individual and collective relationships. It is also necessary to integrate the economic, sociological, and educational disciplines into the managerial discussion of diversity.

Managing diversity is a strategic effort, and allows companies to take advantage of the economic, creative and innovative advantages that diversity brings. This involves a commitment to human resource management systems including “recruitment, reward, performance appraisal, employee development and individual managerial behaviours in delivering competitive advantage through leadership and team work” (Basset-Jones, p.170). As noted, the goal of diversity management is to provide a competitive advantage through the benefits associated with a varied workplace. Properly managed, this process can increase the overall satisfaction and commitment of the workplace and lead to viable benefits including profit, resource acquisition, marketing, creativity, problem solving and organizational flexibility (Cox, 1991).
Diversity management is a process that “involves creating a positive environment where employee’s attitudes and behaviour are altered through training and awareness” (Ewoh, 2013, p.109). This commitment moves beyond the economic benefits of diversity, and into the realm of social responsibility. Addressing social responsibility and enhancing organizational performance can both be achieved by effectively managing cultural diversity. This strategy involves helping individuals reach their full potential and ensuring quality of life for all members of an organization (Doherty and Chelladurai, 1999). Organizations that champion diversity provide leadership and social responsibility such as mentoring, succession planning, family-friendly programs, flexible work arrangement, training and accountability (Sabharwal, 2014). Organizational leaders must be the drivers behind effective management of diversity, and must establish safe and positive environments for educating diverse work groups towards respect and acceptance of diversity.

In order to yield benefits associated with diversity, diverse individuals and perspectives must be effectively integrated into work group and organizational processes; thus, there is emerging emphasis on the concept of inclusion (Stewart, Crary and Humberd, 2008). Inclusion is related to the removal of barriers that block employees from using the full range of their competencies and skills; and, is linked with an employee’s ability to fully and effectively contribute to a workgroup or organization (Roberson, 2005). Managing diversity includes the recognition that diversity is valuable, and that yielding that value involves both employers and employees establishing inclusive behaviours, processes, and cultures (Stewart, Crary and Humberd). From a management perspective, valuing collaboration and inclusion benefits all:
When work is organized in this way, employees at various levels participate in decision-making forums where the different backgrounds, experiences, and different perspectives are understood to enhance the productive potential of teams. As employees engage in diverse social activities and language practices, workplace culture and a valuing of difference are seen as the basis for employee motivation, public image and organizational effectiveness (Solomon, p.42).

Organizations must create a climate for inclusion in order to create an inclusive environment. This is defined as the “shared perception of the work environment including the practices, policies, and procedures that guide a shared understanding that inclusive behaviors, which foster belongingness and uniqueness, are expected, supported, and rewarded” (Boekhorst, 2015, p. 242). When organizations sincerely value and embrace diversity by linking it to work processes, tasks, and strategies, the result is a significant improvement in teams and groups (Ely and Thomas, 2001). One of the ways to develop an inclusive environment is to engage authentic leaders to role model, communicate and reward inclusive practices that are esteemed by the organization.

Organizations with effective and authentic leadership can significantly influence the formation of a climate for inclusion. By helping their followers understand the value of individual differences and using their leadership role to support and encourage followers to apply their individual differences to improve work processes, leaders can foster an inclusive work environment. Authentic leaders tend to engage in a variety of inclusive behaviours, including genuinely valuing diverse perspectives, encouraging participative decision-making,
and supporting open communication (Boerkhorst). More specifically, since authentic leaders are role models (Luthans and Avolio, 2003), they can shape a climate for inclusion by role modeling inclusive conduct for their followers. By demonstrating inclusivity and respect for diversity, this type of leadership creates followers who learn how to behave in an inclusive manner and helps foster a climate for inclusion (Boerkhorst).

The management of diversity, therefore, balances the economic, sociological, educational and managerial needs of an organization. It allows for different perspectives to have their role in benefitting either the people or the bottom line, but it’s important to consider the integration of these perspectives when analyzing effective ways to manage a diverse workforce.

Diversity training

Managing and valuing diversity training is the most important starting point for effectively managing diversity in the workplace (Cox, 1993). In recognizing the internal and external changes in demographics, combined with increased global business opportunities, organizations are actively developing training initiatives to develop inclusive organizations and diversity competent leaders (Anand and Winters, 2008). To ensure that employees have the skills and abilities to interact successfully with diverse colleagues and customers, more and more organizations are investing in diversity training programs. According to Cox, two types of training are popular: awareness training and skill building training. Awareness training includes creating an understanding of the need for managing and valuing diversity as well as increasing self-awareness in areas such as cultural sensitivity (ibid). Skill-building training involves
educating the workforce in regard to cultural differences and how to effectively respond to these differences in the workplace (ibid).

Culturally competent workplaces focus diversity training on building skills and competencies that enable learners to value differences, and to use these differences to make better business decisions. Additionally, there is consistent agreement among practitioners that ongoing learning is necessary to become diversity competent. Best practices for diversity training include making this type of training integrated, ongoing, relevant, applicable, and based on solid needs assessment (Cox). Additionally, training should not happen only in the classroom but rather should be integrated into other business processes and activities.

In establishing a collaborative model for diversity training, concepts of sociocultural, situated and transformative learning must be considered in order to effectively educate adult workers on important diversity issues. Training should involve dialogue and socialization that allows learners to explore cultural significances and include activities such as:

- Comparing and contrasting previous and current experiences and the language of different contexts
- Examining the relationships among culture, context, and texts and how language and other representations of meaning operate
- Problematizing situations to address the issues around the collisions that occur around the encounters
- Developing a broad repertoire of communication skills that help employees to engage in the new and various contexts, their ambiguities, and the collisions that are likely to arise (Solomon, p.49).
Role of organizational leaders

In order to effectively manage diversity in regard to training employees and promoting inclusive environments, organizations need leaders who are trained to convey the importance of organizational initiatives to employees. Cox (1991) claims that in order to transform organizations into inclusive and diverse environments, top management’s support and genuine commitment is crucial. He claims: “Champions for diversity are needed – people who will take strong personal stands on the need for change, role model the behaviours required for change, and assist with the work of moving the organization forward” (p.52).

These ‘champions’ are vital in creating inclusive environments that integrate a diverse workforce and support differences among employees. This type of leadership provided by well-trained leaders and managers who understand the challenges of diversity management; and, have the “emotional intelligence and commitment necessary to build a personal relationship with each individual, or group/team member” (Basset-Jones, p. 173). Sustained and sincere effort and commitment is necessary to bring about the benefits of diversity, as research has shown that “improving organizational performance requires leadership which is dedicated to fostering inclusion and that empowers employees so they can influence work group decisions” (Sabharwal, p. 211). Leaders who promote inclusivity can help their organizations attract a high functioning work force that will bring economic and social benefit to the organization.

Building and sustaining a diverse workforce is not the responsibility of one person in an organization, but rather a shared responsibility. Management has to lead by example and make a definite commitment to diversity. They require a clear understanding of the various cultures represented on their team in order to eliminate any stereotypes or preconceptions. They must
also communicate openly to help team members understand unique aspects of various cultures, and prompt discussion as to how these attributes can be incorporated into the work environment (2016, HR Council). This commitment from leaders and managers is integral to success: “Diverse organizations succeed at sociocultural issues when their managers and educators embrace heterogeneity; involve workers in decisions at all levels; acknowledge and work with (rather than oversimplify) the complexity of the systems; and communicate richly, multi-directionally, and dialogically” (Bierema, 2002 p.76).

**Best practices for organizations**

Best practices for managing diversity are based on research and data collected from a number of studies on culturally competent organizations. According to the research, acknowledging differences, recognizing various skill sets and promoting inclusive environments are key ingredients to effective diversity management (Kreitz). Employers must frame diversity as part of their strategic planning in order to identify the trends and benefits that diversity will bring. This involves considering the economic, managerial, social and educational perspectives of diversity that prompt progressive companies to recognize the value in effective management and training of a variety of initiatives. Once again, integrating these perspectives helps organizations consider the most effective methods to build cultural capacity in the workplace.

As previously mentioned, workplace learning is based on sociocultural contexts, situated knowledge and transformative experiences. In order to effectively manage a diverse workforce, educators and learners are encouraged to “engage more reflexively with their conceptualization of culture and difference and the accompanying workplace learning
practices” (Solomon, p.48). Specific suggestions for being socially and culturally aware are organized into three areas: “recognition of one’s own cultural identity and assumptions about culture and difference, recognition of the culture of the workplace and its assumptions about culture and difference, and recognition of the cultural dimensions of workplace learning” (ibid). These suggestions are very culturally specific, as research shows that culture is integral to the workplace; therefore, best practices for effectively managing diversity must include recognition of assumption, culture and difference.

Organizations that are benefiting from the strength of diversity know that commitment to diversity is not a one-time goal. In fact, successful workplace diversity requires a strategic, long-term commitment of organizational resources that focus on diversity goals that are seen as valuable to achieving business objectives (Kreitz). This may involve initiatives such as “data-driven planning, carefully articulated goals, judiciously applied organization changes, and soundly gathered and ruthlessly analyzed metrics” (ibid, p. 105).

A summary of the leading practices for diversity management includes commitment from leadership, diversity as part of strategic planning, diversity linked to performance, employee involvement, diversity training and recruiting for diversity (Kreitz). Additionally, Cox (1991) lists specific features that are present in effective organizations that incorporate diversity and inclusion:

1. Pluralism: reciprocal acculturation where all culture groups respect, value, and learn from one another
2. Full structural integration of all cultural groups so that they are well represented at all levels of the organization

3. Full integration of minority culture-group members in the informal networks of the organization

4. An absence of prejudice and discrimination

5. Equal identification of minority and majority group members with the goals of the organization, and with opportunity for alignment of organizational and personal career goal achievement

6. A minimum of inter-group conflict which is based on race, gender, nationality, and other identity groups of organization members (p.52)

Conclusion

Understanding the impact of diversity in the workplace is essential for leaders, managers, and organizations who strive to be competitive, creative and innovative in the new world of work. By recognizing the importance of sociocultural, situated and transformative learning perspectives in a diverse workplace, as well as the role of leaders and managers, progressive organizations can incorporate best practices for managing diversity and enjoy the benefits that this will bring. Our world of work is changing, including how we learn at work and the role of organizational leaders in creating inclusive environments that capitalize on individual strengths. There are many guidelines and suggestions for effective diversity management, and organizations that plan for diversity as well as recruit, train and motivate their work teams will place themselves advantageously to gain economic, managerial, social and educational returns.
on their diversity investment. Integrating these perspectives will allow companies to realize the range of benefits and opportunities that diversity brings and provide a fuller understanding of such an important and timely issue.
References


Jennifer (46/50)

Excellent work on the additions and clarifications! There are some minor edits, see tracked changes. One writing point with the use of ‘this,’ when we speak we use ‘this’ all the time and the referent is implied. In writing, it is easier to understand for the reader if you include the referent to the ‘this’. See tracked changes for examples. Can you also let me know if you are submitting to the DPTR.

Reflective Essay: 14/ 15  
Participation: 13/ 15  
Proposal: 18/ 20  
Essay: 46/ 50  
Final Mark: 91/100  
Final Grade: A

It has been a pleasure working with you Jennifer. Congratulations on the successful completion of the course and of your program, both are great accomplishments. I hope that our paths cross in the future.

Kind regards, Angela