

Conference theme:

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights in Times of Austerity

Stream title: Inclusion and Work: addressing the Global Challenges

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Conference Extended Abstract

An analysis of employee and leader perception to diversity and inclusion in a multinational in Switzerland.

Purpose

Global migration has become a norm as millions of people move from one country to another in search of new opportunities, bringing new skills, innovation and creativity. Consequently, organizations have had to face the challenge of integrating foreign-born workers into the workplace. Today, it is about valuing the differences in the hope that these differences create value. Griswold, head of the Cato Institute Centre for Trade Policy Studies, remarked that immigration is part of the American way of life and has contributed to the productive capacity of the nation. "Immigrants have developed new products, such as java computer language, that have created employment opportunities for millions of Americans" (Griswold, 2002). This research paper explores employee, line managers, and leaders perception of diversity and inclusion (D&I) and its implementation through use of specific Toolkits. The empirical study has been conducted to test the hypothesis; the level of perception of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) is high amongst employees, leaders and managers because they use the Toolkits made available by management.

Design methodology

Research has been carried out at the Swiss office of a multinational organisation who were interested in finding out about the perception of D&I, usage of the Toolkits to engender diversity and inclusion, and leader behaviour in promoting an inclusive environment. The organisation employs up to 20 different nationalities, however, Swiss nationals make up the majority of workers at the office.

The method concerns a literature review and use of qualitative research methods were applied as interviews and observation allow for a more detailed and in depth examination from data based on the human experience. Round one interviews were recorded to ensure the complete preservation of information while focusing on identifying clear patterns in the data to allow systematic analysis. Respondents were not given the opportunity to validate data by reading through it, however, to avoid researcher bias, contradictory evidence was examined by using constant comparison, meaning that the interviews were compared with previous data, and previous answers given by respondents. Round two interview was one semi-structured interview combined with observation allowing for flexibility and subtleties in questioning. A sample of 11 employees from diverse positions and backgrounds as well as nationality

were selected to ensure diversity; three leaders, three line managers, and four employees, and the DIO.

Participants answered questions on their perception of diversity and inclusion, commitment from top management towards D&I, and usage of the specific Toolkits. The findings are two fold; the efforts of the organisation are appreciated by all, yet, the organisation needs to communicate the activities better to increase awareness internally, and secondly, while employees are keen to participate in activities to a certain degree, they wish to have a say in deciding the activities to be included in the Toolkits.

Findings

The results of the study indicate that diversity is perceived in terms of gender, nationality, culture and age, while inclusion is viewed as the integration of people from different backgrounds who have different experiences. Initial observation suggests a very narrow definition of both compared to definitions in literature. Commitment was perceived differently by leaders and line managers from that of employees, while all recognise management is doing something, leaders see it in terms of promotion, line managers perceive an improvement in gender equality and greater awareness of different ethnic groups, employees are less convinced of any improvements. The discrepancy between leaders and employee's perceptions could have to do with the fact that leader's appraisal performance is linked to promotion of D&I activities within the organisation. One negative implication is the abuse of the promotion system; one case was mentioned of a woman who had been promoted to a new position above her capabilities, she ended up resigning from the company. The results of the investigation into use of Toolkits shows they are not adequately communicated, even leaders do not associate the Toolkits as D&I tools. The findings suggest strong employee preference for ownership of the D&I Toolkits, which means they would prefer to have a say on the activities that are included in the Toolkits.

Taken together, the results suggest that all agree it is a good idea to create an inclusive working environment, initial results show a preference for informal activities not requiring too much effort on the part of participants, a possible explanation for this might be that participants do not want time intensive activities. Data here showed a preference for Lunch & Learn, and sports activities which are low impact commitment, inexpensive, fun and voluntary. Food and sport are universal unifying forces.

The empirical findings in this study indicate that despite company contributions in terms of capital and time commitments, the battle to create an inclusive culture has failed when measured against the expectations of the organisation, but have succeeded as far as employees are concerned. This discrepancy could be attributed to the internalization of D&I activities by the leaders and employees leading to a watered down version. Although the study was based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggest that an organisation does not have to spend a lot of money to create an inclusive culture as mentioned above, in times of austerity less is more. This paper suggests that current company policy responses may not only be ineffective in promoting diversity and inclusion, but may even exacerbate the process of inclusion by not including the very people they are trying to include in the process from the start.

Research limitation

However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied as the findings may not be transferable to the whole organisation. Further research is recommended to explore the influence of different dominant cultures on inclusion in the global organization.

Practical implications

It is suggested that articles such as this encourage organizations and institutions to build inclusiveness from the bottom up and not top down, findings demonstrate that the inclusion of employees early on in the process could lead to more successful results; achieving inclusion means starting with the people to be included.

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