**EDI Conference (Toulouse- July 2012)**

**Managing Diversity in India: Comparing Public versus Private sector approaches to managing diversity in Indian organizations**

The term managing diversity (MD) has recently entered the Indian human resource management (HRM) lexicon, however, it is quite limited in its recognition and coverage of diversity groups. In India, affirmative action is known as ‘reservation’ and is defined in the 1950 Constitution primarily as quotas for the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Other Backward Classes (SC/ST/OBC) in higher education, civil service and legislative institutions, in addition to some secondary quotas for persons with disabilities and women. There is also recognition of other salient diversities in the complex Indian context, such as, geographic, linguistic, educational, cultural, and religious differences which are perceived to be just as important as caste. Since the complex socio-cultural context of the Indian society has very strong religious roots, it is generally accepted that there is a need for the upliftment of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, however, the definition and extension to the OBC is extremely controversial. Moreover, there is strong resistance to extending reservations into the private sector. Interestingly, in India a person’s religion and caste is generally indicated by the person’s family name but the reservation candidate has to present a caste certificate rather than ‘self-identification’ which is normally used in western countries. As well, there has been substantial resistance to the enumeration of the castes in the latest 2010 census, despite the goal of outcome based measures of achieving representation.

The public sector makes accommodations in the recruitment process, for the ST, ST and OBC, by relaxing some of the qualification criteria such as minimum age, minimum cut-off in percentage marks required for admission in public institutions of higher education, and providing targeted training sessions to help prepare for entrance exams and interviews. The MNCs in the private sector claim to make some accommodations, for women only and primarily after they are hired on merit, by allowing for maternity leave, flexible work arrangements to balance work-life responsibilities, and guidelines for their personal safety in the workplace. Given the strict Indian socio-cultural limitations on the conservative housebound roles and expectations of women, these initiatives have indeed opened up increasing opportunities for working women in the new Indian economy as well as provided some freedom from the traditional restrictions, both at home and at work. The public sector is reconciled to the expectation that reservation is here to stay while the private sector does not expect it to be imposed on them in the near future despite increasing pressures from the target groups and the government.

Regulated public organizations in India are entrenched in compliance mode, primarily during the recruitment process, and do not extend any reservation opportunities or accommodations to anyone outside these three protected groups, although some also include quotas for the disabled. The private sector is resisting, reacting, debating and negotiating with the government on the terms of reservation to be considered in the future, if at all. The MNCs are content with their accommodation efforts towards women but there is no indication to extend these to any other diversity groups despite the recognition that there are many other group based differences in the Indian population. Given the presence of diversity issues, equity and equality challenges, and inclusion needs of the marginalized groups, more awareness, education and research is necessary to develop theory and practice in order to minimize and ultimately eradicate discrimination, harassment and exclusion from the Indian workplace.

AUTHOR INFO

Rana Haq is Assistant Professor at Laurentian University’s School of Commerce and Administration of the Faculty of Management in Sudbury, Ontario. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the Human Resources and Organizational Behaviour stream both on campus and online. Her research interests are in managing diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace; international comparative human resource management, cross-cultural communications, organizational behaviour, gender and marginalized groups in entrepreneurship, and has several conference presentations, cases, book chapters and journal papers published on these topics. She is a Director on two Entrepreneurship oriented projects under the North American Mobility in Higher Education programs funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), US Department of Education Funds for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), and the Mexican Secretary of Public Education (SEP). These multi-year partnerships involve two universities in Canada, two in the US and two in Mexico: “Alliance to Enhance Entrepreneurial Impact to Stimulate Economic Growth Among Underserved Groups in North America” and “Profiles in Entrepreneurship: North American Models of Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship (PENAMICE)” designed to teach students to acquire the skills and knowledge base necessary to understand, analyze, develop models, and practice entrepreneurship in Canadian, Mexican and US markets. She is a member of the Academy of Management (AOM), Administrative Sciences Association of Canada (ASAC) and Association of International Business (AIB).