

Chapter 20

Leveraging Workforce Diversity and Team Development

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ABSTRACT

In this broadening landscape of business, corporations are encouraged to develop global leaders. “Changes in workforce demographics resulting from globalization, combined with the rising popularity of team-based management techniques, have resulted in a practical concern with the management of multicultural groups” (Thomas, 1999, p. 242). Organizations are challenged to implement a comprehensive approach to global development that encompasses different cultural perspectives. This chapter proposes to utilize team-based learning within a cross-cultural work-group. The use of a collaborative approach supports the social dimensions of learning and can exhibit greater productivity for individuals. According to Jonassen, Strobel, and Lee (2006) as cited by Schaffer, Lei, and Paulino (2008), “Knowledge exists not only in the heads of learners, but also in the conversations and social relations among collaborators” (p. 144).

This chapter will emphasize the importance of collaborative team-based work groups among diverse settings. First, the authors will discuss the factors of diverse teams and identify the stages of group development focusing on Tuckman’s Model. In addition, Gert Hofstede’s cultural dimension will be addressed. Finally, organizational contexts that impact the performance of diverse teams such will be explored.

INTRODUCTION

Due to globalization, emerging markets, boundary-less labor pool, the workforce of most organizations have become much more diverse. Many corporations must also address workplace inequalities while harnessing the power associated with the concept of diversity (Gopal, et al., 1997). In many industrialized nations, it is not uncommon to visit institutions or organizations that employ individuals from a multitude of cultural backgrounds. In 2003, it was estimated that international foreign workers globally consisted of approximately 25 million people, of which an estimated 14 million live in United States; 5 million in Northwestern Europe; half a million in Japan and about 5 million in Saudi Arabia (Knox, Agnew, & McCarthy, 2003). These groups of professional experts are drawn to fill positions as blue-collar workers; language teachers and entertainers. In 2008, the United States granted permanent resident status to over one million people (US Department of Homeland Security, 2009). The labor pool is no longer limited by national boundaries and cross-cultural work groups have become the norm.

Concerns of workers among cross-cultural groups not only pose challenges to employers, but barriers such as communication skills, cultural difference, lack of training, and culturally inept programs have impede efforts and productivity. Working collaboratively among diverse workgroups and cultures requires education where employees with good working skills can enhance organization's output and create opportunities for others to improve.

Collaboration can be a key step to learning that fosters innovation and growth. The use of collaborative approach supports the social dimensions of learning and can exhibit greater productivity for individuals. Following with the rapid technological change, globalization and aging labor-force, the workforce landscape now requires diversity of skills and education (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). As organizations become more diverse, it is important

to have strong communication skills, problem solving abilities, interpersonal relations, and the capacity to work effectively within diverse team.

Understanding the role of diversity in the underpinnings of a global workforce is one of the most important issues in the field of international business (Jain & Tucker, 1995). As cross-cultural teams continue to be part of the everyday business, the need to understand teams beyond western concepts continues to grow. The following section will define team both from functional and diverse perspective

TEAM WITHIN DIVERSE SETTINGS

Value of Team

Globalization has caused a network of relationships and organizational links within the business world. To stay competitive in today's market, organizations seek ways to create an equitable workplace environment that will make use of the knowledge, skill, and attitude of a diverse workforce. Throughout this chapter, the authors use the term *team* to refer to organizational work group that work interdependently towards a common goal and produces an output that is the result of the team's collective efforts (Oertig & Buergi, 2000).

Teams are made of individuals, often with different backgrounds. As diversity contributes to the creative innovation of a group, it is also diversity that poses challenges. Understanding individual work styles, group dynamics, and cultural variations is important to avoid potential conflicts.

Diverse Teams

The business case for diversity has emerged as a key strategy in a globally competitive market and has become an important business function for American businesses. With the labor pool and the customer base becoming more diverse many organizations are attempting to capitalize on these

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