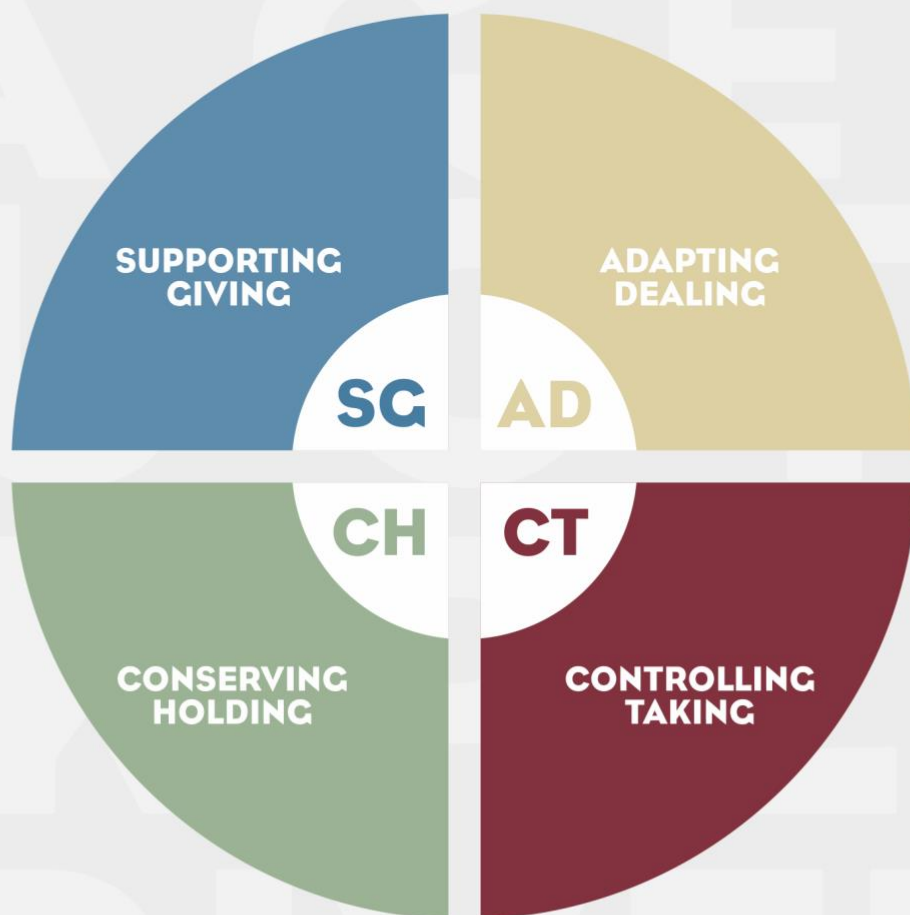


INTRODUCTION TO WORKPLACE CULTURAL DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT



Introduction to Workplace Cultural Diversity Management

Diversity- an exquisite culture exchange experience!

A few years back, travel was the means to culture exchange. Companies that required skills, talents or/and resources available in other countries would plan a trip for the manager to visit a new place. Through travelling, managers or usually top level employees would be exposed to fresh ideas to bring back home. This would result in product improvement, better services, broader networks and increased competitiveness in the market. Travel was similar to a burst of new flavors to the business, customers and competitors. Today, the world has opened up; people and resources are easily transferred from one part of the world to the other. Individuals are in continuous search of companies that can value their skills and talents. Globalization made it possible to earn the fruits of travel through recruiting a diverse workforce.

Imagine a digital marketing company in Saudi Arabia that recruits all nationalities. The company has a diverse workforce from Italy, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and France. A new project was executed where they developed a website for an Italian restaurant opening up in Riyadh. Collaboration among different team members not only led to extraordinary results but also to the development of an exceptional team. The designs of the website were executed by an Italian designer, inspired by his roots and culture and the content was developed in Arabic language by an Egyptian content writer, while the website was marketed through different channels in Saudi Arabia through the Saudi Arabian marketing executive who was well aware of the tastes, preferences and habits of the customers. The cultural fusion definitely developed each employee's individual skill and talent and created a unique and competitive team whom together built an attractive and bizarre website.

Defining Diversity

Diversity can be defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. (Esty et al.1995). Diversity has opened the door to the exchange of new skills, languages, experiences and ideas. However, with an increasingly diverse workforce, it has become a requisite for managers to understand individual

differences in order to develop effective teams and in return create fully functioning organizations. Beyond the idea of sharing new food, exchanging cultural information and traditions, a diversified workforce is not a once in a lifetime experience but rather a journey of knowledge, acceptance, tolerance and understanding.

Employees are searching for diversity

Whether an employee is applying for a new job or a customer searching the company culture and values of his/her favorite brand, great interest is now shifting towards appreciation of a diverse workforce. In a 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey, 47% of millennials are actively looking for diversity and inclusion when sizing up potential employers. Moreover, in the 2018 survey 74% of individuals believed their organization is more innovative when it has a culture of inclusion. ¹

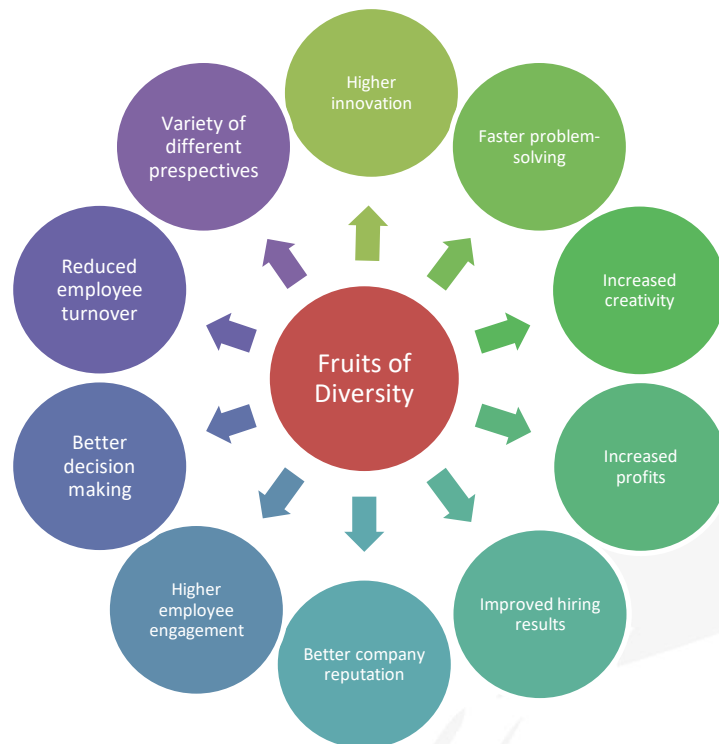


Figure 1-Soure: <https://www.talentlyft.com/en/blog/article/244/top-10-benefits-of-diversity-in-the-workplace-infographic-included>

¹ <https://www.webershandwick.com/news/millennials-at-work-perspectives-on-diversity-inclusion/>

As shown by figure 1 above, diversity leads to the sharing of different perspectives, higher innovation, faster problem solving, increased creativity, increased profits, improved hiring results, better company reputation, higher employee engagement, better decision making, and reduced employee turnover. A Boston Consulting Group study found that companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues due to innovation. A diverse workforce today is a valuable asset and a competitive agent. Diversity allows talents to pool together and thus results in greater results. New experiences, cultures and information is being exchanged and thus more chances of creativity and innovation exist. The key to achieving those benefits still remains within the hands of top managers and the board of directors to set values and develop a corporate culture that accepts, motivates and promotes individual talents.

Individuality- an organization's true value proposition

From the product to process to customer, companies today are fierce-fully competing to maintain their place in the market. Products have turned into solutions where customers are no longer searching for the specs of the product alone but for the quality, friendliness of the staff and even the stories behind the brands. Successful marketing campaigns have shifted their focus from promoting their products to promoting their value, and to deliver value they must first understand "the people". An understanding of psychology and what shapes and distinguishes humans from one another is equally important to managing the operations of the company. Flourishing businesses like Google and Apple have their success rooted to understanding and creating for the "people". Whether, the focus is on company culture and providing the best environment for their employees or on formulating the right customer oriented strategy, it all comes down to one thing, "understanding the people".

"Why are we different?"

Many studies and theories have tried to answer the question "why are we different". Understanding individuality and personal variation is a common topic of personality psychologists. *The Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) defines individual differences in terms of enduring psychological characteristics. Individual differences are the more-or-less enduring psychological characteristics that distinguish one person from another and thus help to define each

person's individuality. Among the most important kinds of individual differences are intelligence, personality traits, and values.²

Individual differences not only shape behavior and individual sense of self, but also, explain why individuals differ in traits such as skills, aptitudes and abilities to learn and perform. The *Sage Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Sullivan, 2009) has a definition of individual differences that is particularly geared to learning. Learners may vary in their personalities, motivations, and attributions for their successes and failures when learning—all of which may affect how and why they learn.³ Traits may differ according to their resistance to change, where some traits like effort and attributions of success and failure may be adaptive while gender, culture and race are more stable.

Individual differences- building blocks of learning organizations

Understanding individual differences is crucial to creating learning organizations. According to Senge, a learning organization is a place, in which people “continuously deploy their capabilities, fulfill their true targets, in which new ways of thinking are supported and new common hopes are delivered. Unlike traditional, controlled organizations, learning organizations are not rigid in nature; they focus on promoting and nurturing employees’ creativity and innovation in order to survive in today’s dynamic environment. Competition, technological advancement and mobility of resources are forcing companies to step out of the traditional process oriented models followed in the past. Today, successful companies know that their value in the market will remain as long as they focus on developing systems that foster the growth and development of their employees. Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organization learning occurs. ⁴

Importance of understanding individual differences

To build organizations that can prosper and grow, more focus has been given to employee observation and assessment. Most managers have come to the conclusion that the key to developing well-functioning teams is through understanding individual differences. Differences in personality traits and behavior may result in employees behaving differently in similar work environments and in return reaching different results. Employees are shaped by different factors including age, ethnicity, gender

² Jeanine M. Williamson, [Teaching to Individual Differences in Science and Engineering Librarianship](#), 2018

³ Jeanine M. Williamson, [Teaching to Individual Differences in Science and Engineering Librarianship](#), 2018

⁴ The Fifth Discipline, Peter M.Senge, 2004

and physical attributes. Not to mention, that individuals in the workplace may differ in their response to emotions, motivation and peer pressure. Identifying the personality and need of each individual in the work place will allow managers to create extraordinary results. Intelligent managers who are not able to develop a full functioning team where employees complete one another are no longer considered valuable assets on their own. As quoted by Senge “How is it possible, that a team of engaged managers, which have an individual intelligence quotient of over 120, only have a collective IQ of 63?”⁵ The answer to this question lies truly in the understanding of people and team management.

Tools for understanding individual differences

Several assessments and applications are being used to help managers and HR members evaluate and develop employees. Recruiters are now referred to as the “talent acquisition team”. Companies are increasingly investing time and resources for the purpose of boosting the productivity, mental health and wellbeing of their employees. Personality tests are a common strategy used by employers in order to increase team effectiveness and create happier employees. Some of the common personality tests used today include:

1. **Myers-Briggs:** Myers-Briggs type indicator is a test that can be used both in the workplace and for individual use. Through a series of questions, this assessment measures whether an individual is extroverted or introverted, whether they have a sensing preference or an intuitive preference when it comes to processing information, whether they prefer to make decisions by thinking or feeling, and whether they have a judging or perceiving preference about how they do things.
2. **DISC:** another increasingly popular personality assessment. DiSC measures: Dominance, influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness.
3. **HEXACO Model:** This is typically administered online for free. It is based on the Big-5 and measures honesty, humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.
4. **LIFO Methods:** The LIFO Survey is a self-reporting assessment that identify individual preferences of how to think and get things done, as well as how to receive or deliver information. It is a

⁵ The Fifth Discipline, Peter M.Senge, 2004

practical application of behavioral science that allows to see how to operate more effectively in various situations. Together with the LIFO Method, it promotes individual and group productivity by providing effective strategies for increasing efficiency and influence with others.

Online tools include:

1. *WorkStyle*: WorkStyle measures each employee's personality through a range of personality tests, such as the Jungian Type indicator, the occupational intelligence scale, the Big-5 and the DISC assessment.
2. *Winslow*: Winslow is a tool that measures personality, behavior, and attitudes of employees or potential employees. It measures 24 traits across four categories: interpersonal traits, dedication traits, organizational traits, and self-control traits.
3. *Traitify*: Traitify captures meaningful personality data in minutes. Traitify offers two personality tests: the 'career discovery' test, which takes just 90 seconds to assess how well an applicant's personality is suited for the job role, and the 'employment fit' test that is based on the Big-5 and assesses how well a potential new hire will perform in their possible role before you employ them.
4. *Virtu*: Virtu aims to gather an understanding of each employees' values, which will then allow you to design better teams, based on these shared values and goals. Virtu discovers what drives an employee, what their needs and desires are and analyses an employee's creativity, balance, and stability. Also, Virtu prides itself on no long surveys that people get bored of.

Managing high performing teams

Managing teams is more or less similar to managing a class of students. Have you ever thought what makes a class of 20 middle school students listen to one teacher yet refuse to listen to another? Have you wondered how easy it is to fulfill the lesson's learning objectives when students are attentive and responsive and how difficult it becomes when they have lost control? Usually students respond to teachers they love, and students love teachers who make them feel valued and appreciated.

Organizations just like schools are made of people. Therefore to build effective teams, managers must be able to understand and deal with individuals and later use their understanding to build a cohesive and harmonized team. A few steps may be followed by managers to help them build full functioning effective teams. Dr. Stuart Atkins, the principal author of the Life Orientations® Survey, originator of LIFO® Training and author of *The Name of Your Game* and *Life in the Stress Lane* suggested six building blocks for managing high performing teams:

1. **Confirming strengths:** Acknowledge team members' styles and strengths
2. **Treating negatives positively :** Give feedback that promotes positive behavioral change
3. **Utilizing differences:** Incorporate the unique strengths of each team member
4. **Visioning the whole :** Develop 360° vision for better plans and decisions
5. **Getting agreement :** Get through and get action without creating resistance
6. **Controlling Excesses:** Increase performance by reducing effort⁶

Creating an open culture

Upon evaluating the personality of individuals in the organization, the next step is to evaluate the personality of the organization itself, in other words the organization's "culture". In the age of the connected stakeholder (employees, partners, customers and the communities we serve), your company culture is your brand. Businesses that intentionally create and cultivate a healthy culture are most likely to earn the trust and loyalty of their stakeholders.⁷

⁶ <https://bconglobal.com/Resources/six-building-blocks-to-high-performing-team>

⁷ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/6-essential-aspects-of-workplace-culture_b_59c93aa5e4b08d66155044a7

Several definitions have been proposed to define culture. Simply, when people of different backgrounds and beliefs come together, a culture emerges. When we talk about “work culture” within an organization, what we mean is: a set of shared rules, beliefs, and attitudes that dictate how things are done and how people interact.⁸

Employees spend more time at work than they spend with family. Companies need to define their culture in order to hire suitable employees that fit for their environment. An enthusiastic, extroverted, creative individual would not fit well in a rigid, process oriented firm. Understanding individual differences allows us to answer whether or not individuals are fit for the company and in which part of the company they should be placed.

Culture is more or less the environment in which employees should prosper. Many companies now believe that a positive, open company culture will increase motivation and boost employee productivity.

Whether formally or informally stated, culture will shape a company’s image and brand persona. An open and inviting culture that promotes inclusion and acceptance will result in multiple benefits including:

- Improvements in motivation
- Increased accountability
- More trust and confidence in management and the organization as a whole
- Decreased employee entitlement mentality
- Greater employee engagement
- Increased work satisfaction
- Increased company pride
- Improved customer experience and loyalty
- More cohesive teams

⁸ <https://www.greatgame.com/the-fundamentals/workplace-culture>

- Greater company success as measured by profit and revenue⁹

Company culture will often determine not only how employees are treated but also how they behave when a problem or crisis arises. Although airline companies are often critics for the unfriendly attitude of their employees or their poor customer service, Southwest Airlines have gained customer loyalty through employees who try hard to help. Southwest Airlines have been in the market for 43 years and have managed to communicate its goals and vision to employees in a way that makes them a unified team. Employees are given permission to go that extra mile to make customers happy, empowering them to do what they need to meet the company vision. ¹⁰

One cannot speak about culture without referring to the market leader in technology and online advertising industries, Google. The features that describe Google's unique culture are:

1. **Openness:** department are designed in a way that encourages the sharing of information among employees
2. **Innovation:** employees are always advised to think "outside the box"
3. Excellence that comes with smartness: Employees are appreciated for their results and training programs are designed to motivate workers to continually improve their output
4. **Hands-on approach:** Experiential learning is used to test new ideas and to help employees improve their knowledge and skills this includes on the job training
5. **Small-company-family rapport:** Google maintains a warm work environment where employees can easily talk and share ideas with each other. ¹¹

According to Google's website, the company still feels like a small company with an informal atmosphere, even though it has grown tremendously:

*"At lunchtime, almost everyone eats in the office café, sitting at whatever table has an opening and enjoying conversations with Googlers from different teams... Every employee is a hands-on contributor... no one hesitates to pose questions directly to Larry or Sergey in our weekly all-hands ("TGIF") meetings – or spike a volleyball across the net at a corporate officer."*¹²

⁹ <https://www.greatgame.com/the-fundamentals/workplace-culture>

¹⁰ <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/249174>

¹¹ <http://panmore.com/google-organizational-culture-characteristics-analysis>

¹² <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-company-culture-2062000>

Strategies like these could easily be implemented within companies to help them reach better results.

Investing in your employees

Henry Ford had once said, “The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay.” In order to ensure continuous improvement, companies must not deal with employee development as a one-time task but rather as an ongoing project that requires continuous investment. There are various ways in which companies can invest in their employees:

1. Assist With Personal Branding
2. Pay For Certifications
3. Increase Employee Networks
4. Offer Personal and Professional Development
5. Create Team Building Activities
6. Offer Investment Opportunities – like stock options
7. Offer Perks & Benefits
8. Provide In-house Training
9. Build Leadership Skills
10. Pay For Up-To-Date Technology
11. Help Employees Pursue Their Career Path¹³

Even though, investing in your employees is costly, it yields many benefits. Investing in your employees can:

- ◆ *Increase employee satisfaction*
- ◆ *Increase employee retention*

¹³ <https://www.jobmonkey.com/employer-insights/invest-employees/>

- ◆ *Create employee loyalty*
- ◆ *Boost company's reputation*
- ◆ *Build skill sets*
- ◆ *Increase engagement in the workplace*
- ◆ *Boost the bottom line*
- ◆ *Ensure future growth and long term success*
- ◆ *Attract top recruits*
- ◆ *Create a sustainable workforce*
- ◆ *Increase employee morale*
- ◆ *Create a positive company culture¹⁴*

In the coming issues, we will dig deeper into ways to increase employees' efficiency and productivity.

Conclusion

Diversity is a characteristic of almost all companies today. In order for companies to yield great results managers must be able to understand individual differences, promote teamwork and collaboration through an open culture of positivity and acceptance.

***"Success is organizations that allow their employees to innovate and revel in both successes and failures. It is teams reaching goals and everyone bringing their best work to the table."* — O.C.**

Tanner

¹⁴ <https://www.jobmonkey.com/employer-insights/invest-employees/>

