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The Impact of a Diverse Workforce on an Organization: Challenges and Opportunities

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The Impact of a Diverse Workforce on an Organization: Challenges and Opportunities

By

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An Action Research Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota**

December 2014

Sharon Radd, Ed. D

Date

Signature of Advisor



ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY
.....
School of Business
and Leadership

Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership

This Action Research Project is dedicated to my late father,
who was always there for me and pushed me to learn.

LabaiMomodu Bah

(1919-1996)

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Leadership Action Project Research

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Abstract

There are many factors that impact and influence the wellbeing of an organization. The nature of the workforce is one such factor. This research project focuses on the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization. Diversity in this study embraces all forms of diversity with special attention to cultural diversity in order to best understand the challenges and opportunities of a diverse workforce. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the current practices in organizations related to diversity, and to assess and evaluate current contributions of a diverse workforce to a given organization.

The research question is, “What are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization?” The research methodology was a qualitative case study, including interviews and observations, using appreciative inquiry to learn more about the positive behaviors of employees in a diverse workforce. The salient themes that emerged from the research included the importance of effective communication, trust in relationship, hiring and retaining employees from different cultural backgrounds and training.

One important recommendation of this action research project is that organizations should strive to employ employees of diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences especially because a diverse workforce will lead to higher performance, increased efficiency and improved productivity.

America is becoming a diverse nation. Thomas L. Mesenbourg, Acting Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, pointed out this fact when he said, “The U.S. will become a plurality nation, where the non-Hispanic white population remains the largest single group, but no group is in the majority” (United States Census Bureau, 2012, para. 2) When I use the term diversity, in this study, I will consider all forms of diversity, and pay special attention to cultural diversity, in order to best understand the challenges and opportunities of a workforce that represents many forms of diversity.

Because it is difficult to quantify diverse individuals using culture as a measure, I turned toward race to understand the amount of diversity in the United States of America. According to the U.S. Census Bureau(2011):

The overwhelming majority (97 percent) of the total U.S. population reported only one race in 2010. This group totaled 299.7million. Of these, the largest group reported white alone (223.6 million), accounting for 72 percent of all people living in the United States. The black or African- American population totaled 38.9 million and represented 13 percent of the total population. Hispanics comprised 16 percent of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million. Approximately 14.7 people (about 5 percent of all respondents) identified their race as Asian alone. There were 2.9 million respondents who indicated American Indian and Alaska Native alone (0.5 million), which represented 0.2 percent of the total population. The remainder of respondents who reported only one race, 19.1 million people (6 percent of all respondents), were classified as ‘some other race’ alone. (para.5)

According to Kerby and Burns (2012), “a diverse workforce combines workers from different backgrounds and experiences that together breed a more creative, innovative, and

productive workforce”(p.1). Furthermore, according to Bob Moulesong, Time Correspondent (2012), “successful companies use diversity in their workforce as a competitive advantage”. In other words, cultural diversity in the workplace not only increases the cultural variety of the workforce but it also brings enhanced benefits to the company. This is because the effective strategic management of a diverse workforce in a business leads to a boost in idea generation, the ability to understand a wide variety of customer segments and the ability to expand internationally with greater ease. In other words, diversity is good for organizations and their performance.

Throughout my life, I have been involved with diversity in personal and professional ways. First of all, my parents are Guineans and I grew up in the Republic of Liberia. My family exposed me to diversity by introducing me to various cultures and traditions in West Africa. Furthermore, as a supervisor in my father’s retail - wholesale stores, located in the heart of the city of Monrovia, I had the privilege to work with vendors and customers from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Germany, America and more. In my position, I became aware of the cultural differences and traditions of those I worked with and served. In addition, I had the opportunity to work for German Technical Corporation (GTZ) alongside the United Nation’s Higher Commission for Refugees, where I interacted with a diverse group of individuals from various organizations, nationalities and walks of life.

While working with those multi-national corporations, I learned the importance of sensitivity to the cultures and traditions of the co-workers and refugees whom I served. I learned the value of incorporating business strategies sensitive to a diverse workforce in my day- to-day practice. Most of all, I learned what, according to Cesar Chavez, is the “need to ... cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens [a person’s] community-

and his nation”. All these experiences with diversity have helped to shape my leadership style and management principles.

On the professional front, I have also been exposed to diversity. I have worked in several American organizations such as Boston Scientific Corporation, Primerica, H& R Block and Crystal View Elementary School. I have been part of a diverse workforce as a trainer/manager. I have worked with people of different nationalities, cultural backgrounds, ages, and sexual orientations. We were able to work together as a diverse group of people who recognized and valued individual differences.

Moreover, my leadership studies in the MAOL program have made me aware that both leaders and followers have unique roles to play in sustaining effective, enduring and ethical leadership in diverse organizations. For example, Kouzes and Posner (2007) acknowledge that, “When leaders provide a clear sense of direction and feedback along the way, they encourage people to reach inside and do their best” (p. 290). Thus, my personal, professional and research experiences have increased my desire to know more about the nature of diversity and the impact that diversity can have on any organization, especially in the context of American business organizations. Still, despite my own experience and success as a part of a diverse workforce, I have also seen that diversity in a workforce can bring challenges. I am interested in understanding how organizations are receptive to the wealth of experience that a diverse workforce brings. I wish to explore the thinking and practices of managers as well as the perceptions of lower level staff.

Despite the growing diversity in the nation, it is not apparent that organizations, corporations and communities have recognized the impacts of a diverse workforce. Present day

business organizations should do more to harness the contributions that a diverse workforce can bring.

The purpose of this action research project, therefore, was to shed light on the current practices in organizations related diversity, and to assess and evaluate current contributions of a diverse workforce to a given organization. In addition, the action research project highlighted the challenges and benefits associated with the development of a diverse workforce and offered recommendations on how to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

This action research project has five sections. The next section provides an analysis of the conceptual context, followed by the research question and methodology. Fourth, I present and discuss the results. Last, the summary, recommendations and conclusion are given.

Analysis of Conceptual Context

The purpose of this action research project is to shed light on the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization with a focus on challenges and opportunities. This section reviews the scholarly work that has been done in the areas of diversity management, organizational climate, inclusion and productivity. This section will be organized under the following headings: definition of diversity; impact of a culturally diverse workforce on performance; satisfaction, retention and turnover; and challenges opportunities.

Definition of Diversity

There are several definitions of diversity that apply to organizations. According to Fleury (1999), “diversity is defined as a mixture of people with different group identities within the same social system” (p.110). In other words, organizational diversity is created by groups that show differences along the lines of “race, geographic origin, ethnicity, gender, age, functional or educational background, physical and cognitive capability, language, lifestyles, beliefs, cultural

background, economic category, tenure with organization, and sexual preference” (Bhadury et al, 2000, p.146). As White and Rice (2010) emphasize, diversity in the workforce goes beyond traditional ideas of diversity as race, age, gender to include other issues such as socioeconomic status and cultural differences. A central component of the diversity that impacts organizations, and a primary focus of this study, is cultural diversity.

According to the Webster dictionary (2002), cultural diversity represents cultural variety and cultural differences that exist in the world, society, or an institution. It also represents the inclusion of diverse people in a group or organization. Furthermore, Amadeo (2013), points out that cultural diversity can either bring strength to the group, if valued and integrated properly into the group dynamic. Conversely, it can weaken the group if not properly managed. Cultural diversity includes embracing direct attributes of people such as race, gender, religion, things that are visible, and attributes that are not visible such as how people think, and how they behave. Embracing cultural diversity then means giving everybody an equal opportunity, irrespective of his or her background or individual life styles.

Finally, managing diversity involves understanding that there are differences among employees and that these differences, if properly managed, are an asset to work being done more efficiently and effectively (Jauhari & Singh, 2013).

This study will consider all forms of diversity, and pay special attention to cultural diversity, in order to best understand the challenges and opportunities of a workforce that represents many forms of diversity.

Impact of a Diverse Workforce

There are many factors that impact and influence the wellbeing of an organization. The nature of the workforce is one such factor. This section will discuss the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization in terms of performance, satisfaction, retention and turnover.

Performance: Diversity adds to performance (Jauhari and Singh 2013). These scholars highlighted the growing evidence of the relationship between diversity and increased performance. They explain that diversity raises organizational performance to its full capacity. Thomas and Ely (1996) agree and assert, “A more diverse workforce will increase organizational effectiveness and enhance productivity” (p.2). Moreover, according to Allen and Montgomery (2001), organizations that embrace diversity are better able to meet the needs of clients, especially minority clients who believe that organizations with diverse staff are better able to identify with their everyday experiences, thus improving credibility and work practice.

However, Shore et al (2011) argue that uniqueness of a group or team will provide opportunities for improved group performance only when the unique individual is an accepted member of the group and the group values the particular unique characteristics. Using a reference to age as one form of diversity, Shore et al (2011) point out that an older employee “may have knowledge of the company and its industry that is potentially valuable to the group, if treated equally, this employee will have a strong sense of inclusion and will benefit the group through improved performance” (p. 1265).

This concept of inclusion is important in considering the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization. Shore et al (2011) defined inclusion as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (p.1265). Similarly,

Pelled et al (1999), described inclusion as “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system” (p. 1267). In other words, diversity will increase performance only in the presence of a sense of “belongingness and uniqueness simultaneously” (Friedman, Kane & Cornfield, 1998, p.1265). More and more organizations are now focusing on organizational inclusion as the world becomes a global village.

Satisfaction: According to Lawler and Porter (1967), satisfaction is a reflection of the extent to which individual’s needs are met through their jobs: those who are satisfied are motivated to go to work, where their needs are satisfied, while on the other hand, those who are dissatisfied with work may have low performance. According to Magoshi and Chang (2009), employees’ satisfaction relates significantly to their expectations that the company is committed to understanding and utilizing the unique characteristics of each individual. Consequently, employees’ satisfaction in turn will positively impact their commitment to the organization. Thus, a diverse workforce produces higher job satisfaction and a healthier organizational environment.

Retention and turnover: Retention and turnover are key operational processes within an organization. According to Ramlall (2004), retention can be defined as employees “upholding their professional relationship with the corporate brand due to the feelings of affective commitment to the organization” (p. 264). This relationship could be described as loyalty, which is an important attribute in an organization. According to Organ et al (2006), organizational loyalty entails “promoting the organization to outsiders, protecting and defending it against external threats, and remaining committed to it even under adverse condition” (p.264). That is, loyal employees stay with their employers and establish a positive image of the employer in the minds of outsiders through their positive attitudes and statements. Furthermore, according to

Jauhari and Singh (2013), retention prevents the significant economic impact of losing a knowledgeable employee. Retention also drives down the cost incurred from the recruitment and training of new employees, while maintaining revenue from skilled workers who are familiar with the organization, its routines and its customers. Ultimately, employees' retention improves an organization's profit. Turnover, on the other hand, influences the bottom-line negatively, as it produces operational inefficiency (Nishii, 2013). Thus, the impact of a diverse workforce on these operational processes is enormous. When employees in a diverse workforce experience a sense of belongingness and inclusion and are valued for their uniqueness, their commitment to the organization grows. Consequently, the organization will experience high retention of employees and low turnover, with the accompanying benefits.

Challenges: Despite all the benefits of performance, satisfaction and retention of a diverse workforce, there are some challenges. Hiring a diverse workforce can pose challenges. Nishii (2013) points out that demographic diversity brings about high levels of conflict, turnover and tension. Furthermore, Marina (2010) noted that for organizations simply "hiring a diverse work force is not enough; diversity tends to create conflicts and tension, if not properly managed" (p.236). Brenda (2010) further went on to say that if organizations want to capitalize on the benefits of a diverse workforce, those conflicts and tension must be actively managed in a culturally sensitive manner.

Another challenge of a diverse workforce is institutional racism. According to Rivera and Ward (2010), institutional racism is defined as "practices that directly or indirectly restrict the professional access and mobility of individuals or groups on the basis of race" (p.237).

Furthermore, Rivera and Ward (2010) pointed out that institutional racism often goes undetected

because the practices are simply an expression of the status quo. Although institutional racism is outside the scope of this research, it is an important and relevant topic.

Creating an Inclusive Environment: This study considers what management can do in organizations to create the type of inclusive environment that will cause their diverse employees to feel a sense of belongingness and that will bring out their employees' best performance. According to Miller and Tucker III (2013), "diversity management" is "a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment that values individuals' similarities and differences, so that all can reach their potential and maximize their contribution to an organization's strategic goals and objectives" (p.47). In addition, Cooke and Saini (2010) make the important distinction that, while diversity management is inclusive of affirmative action and equal employment opportunity policies, it is regarded as a better approach than those as it focuses on valuing people as unique individuals rather than on group- related issues covered by legislation. This study will focus on best practices that are culturally sensitive and demonstrate a value for diverse employees as unique individuals.

Summary

The scholarly research reviewed here describes the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization in terms of problems and benefits to an organization. This action project aims to examine the perceptions of ordinary employees and senior management in order to shed light on challenges faced by the diverse employees and highlight opportunities open to management for building an inclusive organizational environment that will capitalize on the unique contributions of diverse employees.

Method

Research Question

My leadership action project attempted to answer the following question: What are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization? Specifically, the questions for the upper management or leaders were: how does upper management or leaders feel about a diverse workforce? What are the strategies employed by upper management or leaders to encourage a diverse workforce? What are the barriers? The questions for base line employees were: how do base line employees feel about diversity in the organization? What strategies could be employed to encourage a diverse workforce? What barriers do they perceive? The research led to recommendations for leadership based on the findings.

Research Design

My research was based on qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2009), “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). In addition, I used a case study methodology which, according to Baxter and Jack (2008), “provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts” (p.545). Qualitative case study research is a valuable method for researchers to develop theory, evaluate programs and create intervention. It helps researchers to focus on the “case” under study, to bind the case within an appropriate time frame and triangulate a variety of data sources. This triangulation ensures that the research topic is explored through multiple lenses that allow for different facets of the phenomena to be studied. Finally, one of the main advantages of qualitative case study research design is that it allows for close

collaboration between researchers and participants and the ability for the participants to give researchers insight into their world through their storytelling (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The Organization

The focus of my research was a non-profit organization based in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. The non-profit organization was identified with the help of my research advisor because it described itself as a multicultural organization and had a 40-year history of successfully employing a multicultural staff. Furthermore, it had received numerous awards, including an anti-racism award. Even though the organization was a non-profit and not a corporation, it provided valuable insights into how an organization can maximize the potential of a diverse workforce, because of its rich history of employing a multicultural workforce. In fact, at the time of the interviews, the organization had employees from over ten different races and ethnicities.

Although I did not make contact with the organization until my IRB application had been approved, the organization agreed to participate in my research via letter. The introduction to the organization provided me full access to interviewees thereby enabling me to maximize participation rates beyond what would have been otherwise possible.

The objective of my research was to collect sufficient data to analyze, compare, and contrast key issues related to my research question. It was my intent that my research should also benefit the organization by providing it with valuable evaluative data to use in its program planning and evaluation. Thus, in the tradition of participatory action research (Whyte, 1991), I discussed the actual goals of the research with the organization and I promised to provide the organization with a copy of the report so that the research would be mutually beneficial.

Data Collection

The data collection consisted of two activities: interviews and observations. Interviews specifically included senior leaders, middle level leaders, and base line employees. I developed a set of open-ended questions for my participants, which were reviewed by my thesis advisor prior to the interviews. These questions served as a guide for the Interviews. See Appendix C for the list of interview questions. A consent form was also developed and used with each participant. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form.

My first step was to interview individuals including senior leaders, middle level leaders, and base line employees of this non-profit organization. The criterion used for senior leader level selection was a minimum of three years and above in upper management level positions with the organization whereas for base line employees the criterion was a minimum of one year and above with the organization. I worked with my professional contact at the organization in order to secure a sample of participants who fit this profile. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form. They were reminded that their answers would be recorded using a tape-recorded. Participants were also reminded that their names would not be used in the findings and that all interview notes would be destroyed by January 30, 2015.

In addition, I conducted observations of staff interactions in two different settings. According to researchers from California State University Long Beach (n.d.), "Observation is the selection and recording of behaviors of people in their environment"(para.4). Observation is useful for generating in-depth descriptions of organizations or events, for obtaining information that is otherwise inaccessible, and for conducting research when other methods are inadequate.

Furthermore, direct observation reduces distortion between the observer and what is observed that can be produced by an instrument such as interview questions and it occurs in a natural setting such as a staff meeting. The context or background of behavior is included in observations of both people and their environment.

My observations included one staff meeting that included senior leaders, middle level leaders and base line employees. I had planned to observe three monthly meetings. However, I did not proceed with the other two monthly meetings because I attended a strategic planning retreat held by the organization instead. At this retreat, I observed interaction among over 30 board members, employees and clients. The information at the retreat reinforced the data I had collected through my interviews and observation, so my advisor and I agreed that the information collected was sufficient to proceed with my research.

My data collection was conducted from early September through early October 2014 based on IRB approval and participant availability. In addition, in order to design and implement the interviews effectively and efficiently from a research methodology perspective, I employed interview best practices as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007). These best practices included offering participants their choice of interview locations to allow for a private interview experience, reinforcing the confidentiality agreement, and designing open-ended, unbiased questions.

Furthermore, I also leveraged the appreciative inquiry best practices outlined by Hammond (1998). Appreciative Inquiry interviews make the assumption that in exploring the best situations, the person interviewed has the potential of revealing the most positive outcomes. Appreciative inquiry best practices allowed me to ask probing questions and collect more information than through a brief survey. It was critical for the information that I collected to be

non-biased and not pre-determined. Being purposeful in my selection allowed me to have a diverse group to interview, yet concentrated in the area of my focus, which enhanced the information collected and in turn, strengthened my recommendations.

I scheduled interviews on a weekly basis; this allowed me to analyze the information and compare and contrast any differences in the data collected. The goal of the interviews was to determine what impact a diverse workforce has on a non-profit organization, and specifically what challenges and opportunities upper management had encountered in recruiting, training, supervising and promoting employees of a diverse workforce and what was the base line employees' level of satisfaction with practices employed by the organization. Finally, the purpose of conducting personal interviews with upper management, middle level employees and base line employees was for them to be able to paint a more vivid picture of their organization and share stories of diverse workforce.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The purpose of the design and execution of the interviews was to gather all information, to summarize and analyze all the data collected and to uncover best practices and gaps. An analysis was done by comparing my interview and observation data with the research literature, and then analyzing key themes and concepts associated with the culture of a diverse workforce, especially from the points of view of senior leaders, middle level leaders and base line employees in an organization. I used two types of coding: open coding and *a priori coding*. Open coding was used to identify, name, categorize and describe phenomena that existed during my interviews and through *a priori coding*, I identified strengths, challenges, opportunities and benefits of diversity in the organization.

I took great care to protect the confidential nature of my data, by scrubbing findings of identifiers. I stored my transcripts and data in a secure location in my home office. The data will be kept for approximately four months and will be destroyed by January 30, 2015. The report will be shared with the organization in order to enhance program planning and evaluation.

Validity

The effectiveness of my Leadership Action Project depended on identifying consistent evidence-based information that supports best practices in a participatory action research project. As a professional trainer and educator, I find the study of the impact of a diverse workforce and its challenges and opportunities in non-profit organization in the Twin Cities of Minnesota to be fascinating. I acknowledged that my passion and enthusiasm for this research action project could undoubtedly influence the lens that I used in collecting and analyzing the data generated from my research.

According to Maxwell (2005) there are two validity threats: bias and reactivity. Bias refers to a researcher being influenced by his or her preconceived notions while reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied (p.124). To reduce these validity threats, I used triangulation in my data collection.

I incorporated several strategies through this research to test the validity of my data collection, analysis, findings and conclusions. For example, I used the following:

- Purposeful selection of interviewees to avoid preferential selection of upper management employees or leaders.
- Querying for story telling or examples for clearer interpretation of opinions.
- Intent listening with purpose and focus to be able to collect precise and accurate data.

- Open-ended questions during interview to elicit answers from interviewees in their own words.

All of the above listed strategies used in my interviews of upper management leaders and base line employees validated the conclusions drawn from my multiple resources (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, I identified common statements and beliefs that were heard consistently in order to strengthen my research. The next section will set out the results and discussion of findings.

Results

This research project studied the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization, highlighting challenges and benefits. The research question investigated was: What are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization? I developed a list of questions (see Appendix B) to capture real stories and practices of employees interviewed. Ten employees at senior, middle and base line levels in a diverse non-profit organization in the Twin Cities were interviewed using a qualitative research design and appreciative inquiry methods that included interviews and observations. Two were senior managers or leaders with an average of 25 years employment history, four were middle level managers or leaders with an average less than 5 years employment history and four were baseline employees with an average of less than 3 years employment history. The sample size of respondents included: gay, White, Black, Latino, Native American Indians, and Asian Americans. The sample also included both male and female employees from different cultural backgrounds and experiences.

From the study the salient themes that emerged were effective communication, trust in relationship, hiring and retaining employees of diverse cultural backgrounds, and training. These

areas could be variously seen as challenges which, if properly handled, could serve as successful managerial strategies and opportunities and in turn as benefits for this diverse non-profit organization.

Effective Communication

The first of the salient themes that emerged from this research is effective communication. The importance and centrality of effective communication was discussed throughout the interviews and observations. Below, I describe the findings related to effective communication in terms of challenges, opportunities and benefits.

Challenges: Ten out of ten employees interviewed stated that a challenging situation in a diverse workforce or organization is communication. All the employees stated that communication is extremely important in a diverse workforce. They indicated that employees need to express themselves clearly and to the point when dealing with diverse staff and youths because if the communication is not clear and precise it may lead to confusion and tension in a diverse setting. For example, some of the base line employees mentioned that use of “too much of big words” to the people being served causes problems. The English used has to be understood and clear for others to follow. The employees indicated that miscommunication can confuse employees and can cause important work to be delayed or not done. For example, instructions for first time campers or youths to the camp have to be very clear and have to be accompanied by demonstrations for the youths to follow.

Besides verbal communication, base line employees pointed to the importance of non-verbal communication. For example, one of the base line employees indicated that Native American Indians do not use direct eye contact with elders or people in authority. As a result, it is important to have sensitivity to the culture of Native American Indians when serving them

since it is easy to misinterpret their lack of eye contact for lack of understanding. Finally, all employees indicated that effective communication is key to overcoming some of the challenges that a diverse workforce faces. This small non-profit organization used various strategies to overcome these challenges.

Strategies: The effective communication strategies used by the leadership of this organization are direct communication with the employees, that is, one-on-one talk with leadership, instant e-mail communication to the employees, small group communication to discuss issues affecting the organization or to implement certain services, and general meetings to communicate plans and actions. According to the leadership, effective communication starts with the organization's mission statement and purpose. That is, the organization's mission statement has to be clear and stand out when employees are delivering goods and services to the people, the community or the public.

All the employees interviewed stated that the organization has to have clear communication strategies if it is to be successful in the local and global competition for funding. One of the senior leaders of the organization mentioned that effective communication is the vehicle that members use to achieve desired services that the organization provides to youths and the communities served. The senior leader went on to point out that communication has to be done properly, that is, it has to be done in a timely manner. If the leader needs to assign a task to an employee, the leader should do it as soon as possible so as to give the employee adequate time to achieve the targeted results.

Some of the base line employees indicated that to serve the youths effectively, the employees need to understand how to communicate with those they are serving. One put it "not using big words; you have to communicate in local jargons and also understand the local

jargons”. According to the employee, if not, the change one wants to bring about for the development and growth of the organization will not occur. According to another base line employee, effective communication strategy allows employees to communicate to middle level or senior leaders if they encounter any problems while trying to communicate the mission and goals of the organization to those they serve.

Benefits: Effective communication brings many benefits to the organization. Clear and precise communication allows senior leaders, middle level leaders and base line employees to deliver services to the youths from different cultural backgrounds and communities effectively and on time. One of the senior leaders mentioned that one of the effective communication tools the organization uses is developing leaders from the various communities to serve in positions of trust in their communities. This communication tool helps the organization to understand the cultures and traditions of the community. The employees would know how to effectively communicate with their community, which would in turn benefit the organization. For example, the organization works with youths from different cultural backgrounds during summer camps and builds discipline and responsibility in them.

Middle level leaders and base line employees indicated that the open communication policy by the organization allows the employees to freely communicate with senior leadership about potential problems which in turn can immediately be solved. According to the employees, this policy can make their job easier and more effective, a situation which benefits the overall goals of the organization.

From the monthly meeting and retreat observed, the organization allows the employees to freely communicate any issues or challenges to senior leadership, which I think is a positive strategy that would benefit the organization.

Trust relationship

The second of the salient themes that emerged from this research is trust relationship. Building a trust relationship is a foundational strategy and a source of pride for this organization. It was discussed throughout the interviews and observations. I describe the data related to trust relationship in terms of challenges, opportunities and benefits.

Challenges: One of the biggest challenges most diverse non-profit organizations face is trust in relationship by employees of difference cultures, backgrounds and experiences. Eight out of ten employees interviewed indicated that trust in relationship was a real challenge amongst the co-workers. While senior management leaders acknowledged that building a trust relationship in that diverse non-profit organization could be a challenge, they pointed out that they had more experience and confidence in addressing the challenge. The senior leaders said they had worked with different diverse groups and cultures for many years and had lots of training about diversity in the workplace. Leadership mentioned that their experience helped them to overcome some of the barriers that are associated with a diverse workforce. For example, they indicated that it takes time to build a trust relationship with employees from different cultural backgrounds and experiences, but the senior employees expressed that in most instances, they tried to put aside their individual differences and similarities and work for the better good of the organization. In addition, the leadership was able to build a trust relationship with the community through its appointment of a diverse board that represented the community served.

In contrast, some middle management leaders and base line employees, who saw trust in relationship as a real issue, had less experience and confidence in addressing the challenge. One base line employee indicated that building trust in relationship is like building a bridge. “You

have to have a strong foundation or else the bridge collapses”. The employee further said, “You have to have confidence and credibility in the individual you are working with”. The employee mentioned that the employees have to know each other well so that they can trust and respect the other person. The challenge lies in getting to know the other person well; for instance, it is important to believe that people can do the job effectively, that they are capable and that they are team players. The employees agreed that it takes time to build confidence and trust with co-workers.

A base line employee elaborated that the employees need more training techniques in trust relationship building in order to be able to work successfully in a diverse organization. The employee stated that “the world is getting big and things are changing too quickly”. When I asked what the employee meant by the statement, the employee explained that the neighborhood that she grew up in is completely diverse now and that people have to learn how to live with each other. The employee concluded that working in a diverse organization is similar. The organization leadership used various strategies to overcome these challenges.

Strategies: The strategies the organization employs to build a trust relationship include assigning employees in small groups or teams to work on a project, giving responsibility and roles for tasks to be done at a specific time, organizing social events for employees’ interaction with each other, and meetings to discuss issues that affect employees and their assignments. These are some of the successful managerial strategies the organization uses to build a trust relationship in a diverse workforce. Even though building a trust relationship was mentioned as one of the challenges of a diverse organization, when leaders build a trust relationship it can help employees of an organization to develop confidence and credibility. The employees stated that building a trust relationship can easily allow an employee to work with fellow co-workers

without any difficulty because the employees can trust that if they make any mistake other employees will tell them directly or correct the mistake and later on let them know what had been done. A trust relationship can lead to a healthy environment and increased productivity.

One of the senior leaders said to me that “once you and your employees have a trust relationship, it is easy for you to accomplish a lot of things together and produce quality services under difficult circumstances”. For example, the employee said, “one day, we did not have the necessary transportation for our youths, but because we have a relationship with each other, we car pooled to different locations and at the end of the day, we accomplished the intended purpose together”.

All middle level leaders and base line employees expressed that a trust relationship is important in a diverse organization because it brings out positive interaction with the employees and leads to productive outcomes for the organization. One of the middle level employees indicated that a trust relationship can prevent tension and conflict in any diverse workforce and increase efficiency and productivity.

Furthermore, during the retreat, I observed that one of the strategies emphasized was trust relationship building with past and present employees, and that it was essential to the success of the organization. The employees had a connection with past and present employees and talked about activities at the camp and fun shared on various trips; these activities were important for building trust and allowed past employees and youths to still be connected to the organization.

Benefits: Building a trust relationship benefits the organization. The employees indicated that learning from different cultures and educational backgrounds was essential in building a strong bond and connection with each other. All employees interviewed stated that connecting authentically with present and past staff and youths is the experience they will not forget easily.

Some of the staff mentioned that one of the most important reasons that they continue to work there is the relationship they have built with co-workers and the youths they serve. Some of the employees stressed the point that relationships that they have built have allowed them to work in an inclusive environment where everyone's voice is important which in turn benefits this organization greatly.

One of the senior leaders stated that a benefit of a diverse workforce is that it provides the opportunity to collaborate with others and to pool ideas and experiences from different perspectives to produce positive outcomes. The employees interviewed said building a trust relationship can promote a healthy and safe working environment. Most importantly, some employees mentioned a trust relationship from a diversity experience in an organization can create and maintain a positive working environment that values individuals' similarities and differences, thus enabling individuals to reach their full potential.

One of the middle level leaders said building a trust relationship is like "building a house until it is finally completed". She explained that building a house requires having a foundation, buying the materials to build the house and putting together everything that is necessary to complete the house; trust in relationship is the same.

It was also observed from the retreat held by this diverse non-profit organization that building a trust relationship was one of the values expressed by the board, staff and youths as hallmarks of this organization. Trust in relationship brings about loyalty as expressed by one of the youths during the retreat. The youth said that loyalty "promotes the organization to outsiders, protects and defends the organization' mission".

Hiring and Retaining

The third of the salient themes that emerged from this research is hiring and retaining employees from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. The organization feels that hiring and retaining employees from different cultural background is very important because it improved performance and increased efficiency and productivity. Similar to the other findings, I describe this theme in terms of challenges, opportunities and benefits.

Challenges: Another challenge expressed by employees was job opportunities for a diverse workforce. They all indicated that job opportunities are limited for people of color or minorities. The senior leadership mentioned that to identify, recruit, hire, and retain a diverse workforce or youths is sometimes challenging. One of the senior leaders observed that the organization's low salary structure makes it difficult to identify, recruit, hire and retain professional people of color or minorities to serve the youth population. All the base line employees mentioned that job opportunities for the youths of immigrants and Native American Indians are a challenge for the organization because some of the youths have criminal records, behavior problems or limited education. However, while the applicant pool is characterized by youths with such challenges, the base line employees believe that it is important to give a second chance to the youth population. The employees also indicated that senior leadership needs to find a way to recruit qualified youths from the areas served because it boosts the morale of the other youths to know that if they do better, they too have the same possibilities.

Some of the base line employee mentioned that the mentoring leadership program recruits and hires employees from outside their community, a situation which sends the wrong signal to the youths within the community. Furthermore, the base line employees also said that

employees hired from outside their community do not understand the culture and traditions of the community served. In some cases, that lack of awareness raised serious tension and conflict among co-workers and the youths served.

This small non-profit organization employed various strategies to address the challenges of hiring a diverse workforce.

Strategies: One strategy that the organization employs to identify, recruit, hire and retain qualified employees is a leadership-mentoring program. The leadership-mentoring program trains the youths and develops the required leadership skills to allow them to serve the organization.

Another strategy is that the organization posts job openings on the organization's website for qualified job seekers to apply. Most importantly, the organization makes it a top priority to interview all applicants who apply.

A third strategy is word of mouth where loyal employees tell other members of the community about jobs at the organization. Employees indicated that a diverse workforce provides them the opportunity to contribute to the organization's strategic goals and mission in a more efficient and effective way. This idea that diversity promotes performance if it is well coordinated and organized was expressed by most of the employees interviewed.

One of the senior leaders said that he has been asked several times "How do you do it? That is, how do you manage to diversify your entire staff?" His answer was simple: "Just do it". He told all those that asked him that question that a diverse workforce brings about better performance and improved services. The benefits of hiring and retaining a diverse workforce are captured below:

Benefits: From my interviews, the senior leaders were very proud of the diverse workforce the organization had and emphasized the need for diversity. One of the senior leadership mentioned that the organization continues to identify, recruit, hire and retain people from different walks of life. The senior leader indicated that even though identifying, recruiting, hiring and retaining employees is a challenge because of low salary structure, the leadership mentoring program is essential to the success of their organization. The senior leader elaborated that the leadership mentoring program allows the organization to identify, recruit, hire and retain youths that have special skills and talents. The senior leadership said that the leadership mentoring program empowers the youths in turn to benefit the organization. The leadership mentioned that youths become loyal and committed to the mission of the organization. The leadership emphasized that the youths' loyalty to the organization enhances performance and productivity of services. The leadership said this also leads to satisfaction of the staff and youths served.

Most of the middle level and base line employees stressed the need for the organization to identify, recruit, hire and retain employees of different cultural backgrounds to serve the youth population. However, the base line employees said it would benefit the organization if the organization identifies, recruits hires and retains employees from the communities served. The base line employees emphasized that recruiting from the community brings about loyalty. Furthermore, the base line employees mentioned that loyalty is important in promoting their organization to outsiders. The base line employees indicated that loyalty is one of the key benefits in a diverse organization and that loyalty increases productivity and honesty within the organization.

From the monthly meeting and retreat, I observed that loyalty was one of the cornerstones expressed by the board, staff and youths. They said that loyalty promotes positive and professional relationships and brings about employee retention. All the employees interviewed stated that employee retention brings about total satisfaction. The employees all indicated that they are satisfied with their jobs and their contributions to the organization

Training

The final theme that emerged from this research is Training. Training is the base of this esteemed organization. The organization feels that if training is properly implemented in a diverse workforce, it will overcome adversities, challenges, and leads to higher performance. Training will be discussed in terms of challenges, opportunities and benefits.

Challenges: Seven out of ten employees supported the research literature that training is very essential in a diverse organization. However, if the training is not well organized, it may lead to confusion and tension especially when working with people from different cultures, backgrounds and experience (Brenda, 2010). The senior leaders indicated that they would love to have many training programs for their employees but there is limited funding for training programs. In addition, the senior leaders pointed out that it is beneficial for employees to be culturally aware and knowledgeable in communicating sensitive information about co-workers or the youths served. In other words, appropriateness of communication and confidentiality is very important to this organization. For example, employees need to exercise confidentiality when dealing with specific communication about ongoing projects and the contents of e-mails. The senior leaders also acknowledged that they as leaders need to play a key role in making a workplace training program a success. The senior leaders said that leaders should be good

examples for their staff to follow. Proper training programs should address topics such as confidentiality and sensitivity of information for a diverse workforce.

Some employees indicated that if employees are not well trained on how to behave in a diverse organization, it can lead to tension or confusion. For example, some middle level leaders said that the manner in which employees express their thoughts could be misinterpreted as insulting. Most of the employees said training was also helpful to overcome some tension and confusion that could exist in a diverse organization. For example, tension can arise when there are delays, micro-aggression and lack of communication that would sabotage the delivery of services. These can occur when people do not talk to each other.

One of the middle level leaders indicated that training should be one of the major priorities of this organization that serves economically disadvantaged youths. The challenge for employees is that they are called upon to serve clients (youths) who are themselves diverse whether through poverty, race, and/or ethnic diversity. However, some of the youths served also experience drug addiction or mental illness. To serve such clients effectively, training is necessary. For example, an employee expressed that the leadership should provide the staff with effective training programs on how to work with youths with mental illness. The employee stated that she worked with a number of youths with mental illness and that she does not know whether she is adequately providing the services needed by this population.

Another middle level leader indicated that training would be necessary to build her confidence and would put her on the right track to communicate the organization's messages effectively. It would further help her to educate staff about the mission of the organization and the appropriate techniques to address tensions and conflicts when they arise. Without training,

the employee said that she does not have confidence in the work she does. The employee stated, “I do not know whether I am doing the right thing”.

Some of the base line employees also indicated that training is essential in educating people how to treat people from different cultural backgrounds. The base line employees cautioned that without proper training programs, the organization would experience tension and conflict.

During the monthly meeting, I observed that the employees stressed the importance of a training program to overcome some of the adversities the employees face while rendering services to the youths. Various organizational strategies were used to address training in this small non-profit organization.

Strategies: The organization employs various strategies to provide training. Some of them include: contracts with professional to lead workshops and seminars on a variety of topics, monthly meetings to discuss issues that affect the organization and retreats to examine in depth the goals and accomplishments of the organization and chart a vision for the future. One of the senior leaders indicated that effective training programs can eliminate injuries, illness and discrimination of all forms and overall increase employees’ morale and confidence when dealing with co-workers and youths served. In addition, another of the senior leaders stated that effective training in a diverse workplace is necessary because it improves employees’ productivity.

Another of the training strategies employed by this diverse non-profit organization as mentioned by the employees is team work. Eight of the employees stated that training in small groups is important for growth and development of the organization. One senior and one middle level leader said that the strength of this organization is allowing staff to work together in small groups or teams. The employees indicated that it brings together the abilities to work with

different cultures and experience. One senior leader told me that teamwork is heavily encouraged by the organization because it enhances the capacity building of the organization. When I asked the employee to elaborate, the employee stated that it motivates individuals with different cultural backgrounds and experience to form a team that stays together and works together for the common goal of the organization. The employee also expressed that training is an important strategy to increase the productivity of the organization.

Interestingly, one base line employee mentioned that team training gives the employees feedback of what the employee is doing right and what the employee is doing wrong. The employee also elaborated that training is essential for problem solving especially in organization like theirs. In addition, training allows employees to advocate for their fellow staff and youths in a more respectful and professional manner. The majority of the base line employees emphasized that training programs such as diversity training competency would help the staff to effectively communicate and build the leadership skills needed when dealing with youths from different cultures and backgrounds.

Benefits: This small non-profit organization derived many benefits from implementing effective training programs. Most of the employees mentioned that training is essential to the success of any organization because it improves their working skills, increases their interaction with co-workers and other partners and finally educates them to various forms of micro-aggression that exist in every organization. This diverse organization has been able to use effective training programs and techniques as strategies to transform challenges into benefits by allowing employees to train and work in small groups to solve problems.

Most of the employees said that the training methods introduced by the organization served them to overcome some adversities they face. The employees indicated that training helps

them to develop loyalty amongst them and youths served. The employees explained that training is one of the key benefits in a diverse organization because it helps the staff to trust each other and, in turn, it helps the youths they serve to trust them. Proper training brings about loyalty which helps the youths to open up to the staff to discuss issues that affect them directly or indirectly. It helps the organization to be more effective in serving the youths and bringing about positive outcomes for the organization. The next section will provide a discussion of the findings.

Discussion

What are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization? This is the research question that has been explored in this action research project. In order to assess both the challenges and the opportunities of a diverse workforce on an organization, I formulated questions and conducted interviews of employees of a diverse non-profit organization in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. I also personally observed the monthly meeting and strategic planning retreat held by this organization in order to interact and get the true picture of how diversity works in an organization.

The salient themes that emerged from the research included the importance of effective communication, trust relationship, hiring and retaining employees from different cultural backgrounds and training (see Figure 1).

These themes are intricately connected and reliant upon each other as seen in Figure 1. Effective communication is represented at the top of the chart to show its paramount importance. In other words, without effective communication, there will be tension and conflict, which will result in little development. Effective communication is directly connected to building a trust

relationship. If employees can communicate effectively with each other in a workplace, they start to develop trust and confidence in each other. As a result, the next aspect that comes into focus is trust relationship that develops among employees and between employees and management or between employees and clients served. Hiring is represented on the other hand to show that it is an arm of the organization that is strengthened when effective communication and trust relationship are built. Training is represented at the base of the diagram to show its role in supporting both incoming employees, and established employees whether at the base line or managerial level.

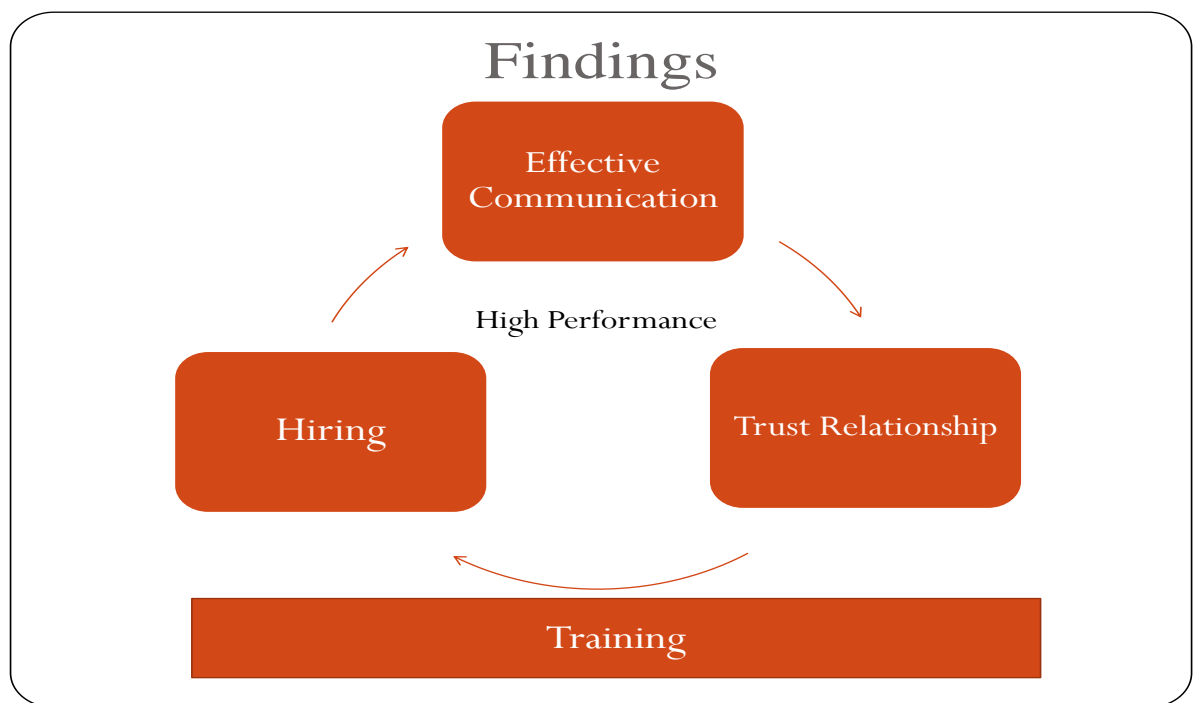


Figure 1: Salient themes from research findings

Finally, when all these dimensions are integrated and functioning smoothly, the result that is central is high performance and overall increased productivity and efficiency

The two highest themes expressed were effective communication and trust relationship building. All the employees indicated that effective communication was essential in the day to

day running of the organization. One of the base line employees mentioned that precise communication is important to eliminate conflict and tension. The employee mentioned that using simple words or “right jargon” was important to communicate with the youths served. Interestingly, the senior leadership who also valued communication looked at communication not from the point of view of use of simple language but from the point of view of its timeliness. I believe that the base line employees refer to the use of simple words because they work directly with the youth population whereas senior leadership deals with the overall projects of the organization so timely communication is significant to the accomplishment of the organization’s goals. Even though the literature review in this research project did not highlight the role of effective communication in a diverse organization, this action research project strongly emphasizes this finding. This is perhaps because, under the current leadership, communication at this diverse organization is open, transparent and highly valued.

As recalled in the findings, another point emphasized by most of the employees was that a trust relationship based on experiences in a diverse organization can create and maintain a positive working environment that values individuals’ similarities and differences, thus enabling individuals to reach their full potential. This view point was corroborated by Miller and Tucker III (2013) in the literature review when they said that “diversity management is a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment that values individuals’ similarities and difference, so that all can reach their potential and maximize their contribution to an organization’s strategic goals and objectives”(p.47). In addition, Cooke and Saini (2010) agreed, regarding diversity management that values people as unique individuals as a best practice.

As was discussed in the findings, another reason that employees stressed the significance of building a trust relationship was that it brings about higher-level performance which would

benefit the organization. This statement was supported by Jauhari and Singh (2013) who highlighted the growing evidence of the relationship between higher-level performance and diversity. Thomas and Ely (1996) also agreed when they assert that diverse workforce will increase organizational effectiveness and enhance productivity.

As recalled in the findings, the youths who were served by this diverse organization also supported the importance of building a trust relationship. This was the story told by one of the youths during the retreat. He said the organization helped him to build a trust relationship with both the staff and youths at the camp. He told the audience that he would not forget those experiences and that is what kept him coming back to the organization. This point of view echoes Allen and Montgomery's (2001) statement that organizations that embrace diversity are better able to meet the needs of clients, especially minority clients who believe that organizations with diverse staff are better able to identify with their everyday experiences.

I think that trust relationship is important to the base line employees because they work directly with youths from different cultures and backgrounds. Some of the youths the base line employees serve had behavior problems, limited education and live in poverty. So building a trust relationship is key to the staff because it opens up the youths to discuss issues that affect them. Staff of this diverse non-profit organization said that trust relationship includes treating everyone equally which brings about strong commitment of inclusion that lead to improved performance. This perspective is echoed by Shore et al (2011) who said that "if treated equally employees will have a strong sense of inclusion and will benefit the group through improved performance"(p. 1265).

Interestingly, as recalled in the findings, while senior management leaders acknowledged that building a trust relationship in that diverse non-profit organization could be a challenge, they

pointed out that they had more experience and confidence in addressing the challenge. As a result, the leaders are able to encourage other employees. As Kouzes and Posner (2007) said, “people anywhere are willing to follow someone—whether it’s into battle or into the boardroom, the front office or the front lines—they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust” (p.32). I believe that senior management leaders encounter trust relationship differently because of their positions and because they do not directly work with the youths.

Other salient themes that also emerged from this action research were hiring and retaining employees of different cultural backgrounds and training. Training was mentioned as an important factor in working with people from different cultural backgrounds. An important aspect of training, according to Jauhari and Singh (2013), is that it increases retention and in turn prevents the significant economic impact of losing a knowledgeable employee. Another aspect of training that this research project emphasized was the role of training in building loyalty and commitment to the organization. This statement was supported by Organ et al (2006) who pointed out that organizational loyalty enables employees to stay with their employers and establish a positive image of the employers in the minds of outsiders through their positive attitudes and statements.

Similarly, the concept of loyalty as part of high performance was emphasized by this small non-profit organization as the outcome of hiring and retaining employees of diverse cultural backgrounds. The senior leaders, middle level leaders, base line employees and my direct observation of the monthly meeting and retreat all highlighted the importance of loyalty. The senior leadership said that the leadership mentoring program run by the organization empowers the youths to become loyal and committed to the mission of the organization.

Furthermore, the leadership emphasized that the youths' loyalty to the organization enhances performance and productivity of services and leads to satisfaction of the staff and youths served. Interestingly, middle level leaders and base line employees stressed that loyalty comes from recruiting and hiring from within the community served. As Organ et al (2006) pointed out organizational loyalty entails "promoting the organization to outsiders, protecting and defending it against external threats, and remaining committed to it even under adverse conditions"(p.264). Finally, Magoshi and Chang (2009) agreed that employees' satisfaction will positively impact their commitment to the organization.

Finally, let me use a coin as a metaphor to illustrate the concept that challenges turned into opportunities result in benefits (see Figure 2). The coin has a head and a tail but if flip around, the head could be a tail and they are both on the same coin. The concept that challenges and benefits are opposite sides of the same coin is represented by the fact that if any element

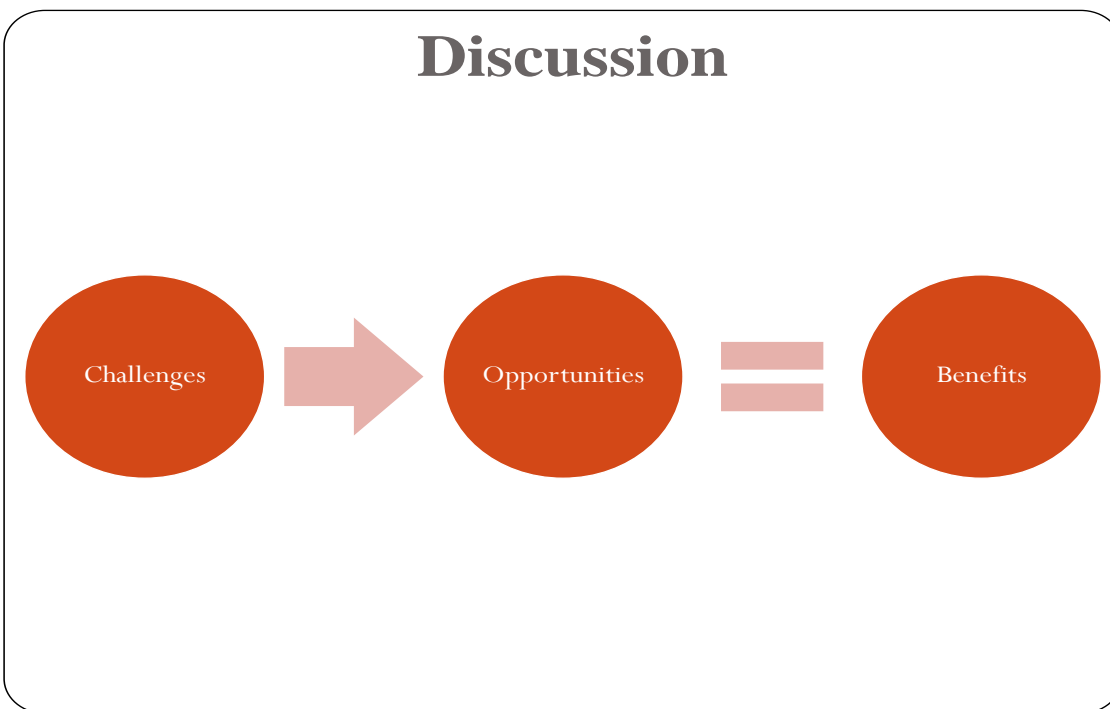


Figure: 2: Integrated Themes

such as lack of communication, lack of trust, lack of training, lack of diversity in hiring is displaced and malfunctioning, the entire organization will be affected by lowered performance, efficiency and loyalty. Hence, the challenges and opportunities of a diverse workforce are like two sides of the same coin. If properly incorporated and well managed, the challenges can be a benefit to the organization.

This small non-profit organization faced challenges of tension, conflict and micro aggression in the workforce. Clearly, these challenges were transformed into benefits through such strategies as effective communication, building trust relationship, and hiring of more diverse workforce. The organization also made sure that, from the top leadership to the base line employees, everyone benefited from training. Thus, as seen in Figure 2 they turned challenges into opportunities and reaped benefits as a result.

In summary, this leadership action project set out to answer the questions: what are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization. From the study, the salient themes that emerged were effective communication, trust in relationship, hiring and retaining employees of diverse cultural backgrounds and training.

Summary and Recommendations

This action research project studied the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization, highlighting challenges and opportunities. According to Jauhari and Singh (2013), a diverse organization comes with many opportunities and challenges which, if not well coordinated and organized, may lead to the unhealthy functioning of the organization. In addition, this study considered all forms of diversity and paid special attention to cultural diversity, in order to best understand the challenges and opportunities of a workforce that represents many forms of

diversity. Interviews were conducted with ten employees of a diverse non-profit organization in the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The sample size of respondents included: gay, White, Black, Latino, Native American Indians, and Asian Americans. The sample also included both male and female employees from different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Two were senior managers or leaders with an average of 25 years employment history, four were middle level managers or leaders with an average of less than 5 years employment history and four were base line employees with an average of less than 3 years employment history.

The research methodology employed a qualitative case study that included interviews and observations and used appreciative inquiry to learn more about the challenges and opportunities of employees in a diverse workforce. The research question investigated was: What are the challenges and benefits associated with a diverse workforce and how can managers use their leadership to maximize the potential of diversity in the organization? I developed a list of questions (see Appendix B) to capture real stories and practices of employees interviewed. The employees were asked questions about the challenges they face as individual employees of the organization, the strategies used to overcome these challenges and the opportunities and benefits achieved by using these strategies.

Many salient themes emerged from the interviews. What stood out was the importance of effective communication, trust relationship, hiring and retaining employees from diverse cultural backgrounds and training. Furthermore, these themes could be variously seen as challenges which this diverse non-profit organization properly handled with successful managerial strategies that transformed them into benefits for the organization. Recommendations for leadership were developed based on the findings of this action research project.

Recommendations

From the research study, the following recommendations were made for a diverse non-profit organization.

- Trust relationship building should be a foundation for any non-profit organization. Most of the staff mentioned that one of the most important reasons that they continued to work at the organization was the relationship they had built with co-workers and the youths they served. Some of the employees stressed the point that relationships that they had built had allowed them to work in an inclusive environment where everyone's voice was important which in turn benefited this organization greatly.
- Effective communication in a diverse workforce should be a top priority, because it reduces the tension and conflict in a diverse organization. Clear and precise communication allows senior leaders, middle level leaders and base line employees to deliver and serve the youths from different cultural backgrounds and communities effectively and on time.
- Training should be one of the best practices of a diverse organization to overcome adversities. It would also provide employees with good feedback to enable them to work effectively in a diverse organization. Since this diverse organization has been able to use training programs and techniques effectively, it should continue to allow employees to train and work in small groups to solve problems.
- The leadership should consider the advice from the base line employees that the organization should identify, recruit and hire qualified employees from within the

various communities served. The base line employees emphasized that recruiting from the communities brings about loyalty.

- The organization should continue to employ employees of diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. Indeed this recommendation should apply to all organizations because the United States of America is becoming more diverse and the workforce has to represent the population. One of the senior leaders said that he had been asked several times “How do you do it? That is, how do you manage to diversify your entire staff?” His answer was simple: “Just do it”. He told all those that asked him that question that a diverse workforce brings about better performance and improved services.

Limitations and Future directions

A limitation of this study was its sample size. There are over 100 non-profit organizations in the Twin Cities with over 1000 employees. A sample size of ten employees was small. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with Twin Cities-based employees only. However, employees interviewed represented a cross-section of employees in this particular non-profit organization. In addition, the interview questions were extensive enough in scope to capture real stories and viewpoints of employees in this non-profit organization.

Another limitation of the study was that it focused on a diverse workforce in a non-profit organization only whereas the bulk of the workforce is employed in other types of organizations such as for-profit organizations, government sectors and other international organizations. However, employees interviewed represented a cross-section of employees in this particular non-profit organization. In addition, the interview questions were extensive enough in scope to capture real stories and viewpoints of employees in this non-profit organization.

Recommendations for further study of the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization should include using a larger sample of employees in non-profit organizations to investigate whether similar findings would emerge. In addition, research should be conducted with other types of organizations to find out whether there are significant differences.

Conclusion

According to Jauhari and Singh (2013), a diverse organization comes with many opportunities and challenges which, if not well coordinated and organized, may lead to the unhealthy functioning of the organization. This action research project set out to study the impact of a diverse workforce on an organization and highlight the challenges and opportunities. The salient themes that emerged from the study were trust in relationship, training and advocacy, communication, and identifying, recruiting, hiring and retaining employees of diverse cultural backgrounds. These research results are significant in light of the growing diversity within the American workforce. If the recommendations based on the findings of this action research project are actively pursued, then organizations would see an increase in employees' performance and productivity.

This action research project will benefit various non-profit organizations, for profit organization, government sectors and international organizations that have a diverse workforce. In addition, if the findings are incorporated and practiced by various organizations, they would benefit employees from different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Furthermore, since America is becoming a diverse nation, these findings will have relevance for leaders in various organizations who need to understand the impact of a diverse workforce on organization.

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Appendix A

The impact of a diverse workforce on an organization-- Challenges and opportunities

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the challenges and opportunities for an organization that employs a diverse workforce. The study explores the thinking and practices of upper management as well as the perceptions of base line staff from different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. This study is being conducted by Abraham Bah, an MAOL graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Radd, a faculty member in the Department of Organizational Leadership. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because of your affiliation with Youth CARE of Minnesota, a multicultural organization with employees of different ethnic, racial and cultural background. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this action research project is to shed light on the current practices in organizations, and identify how best to maximize the potential of a diverse workforce to a given organization. Approximately 10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in one interview session and answer 10 questions about the role that diversity plays in the organization. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time. You are free to stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:

The study has minimum risks. It is possible that underlying conflicts or tensions in the organization may surface during the study and could lead to organizational or personal challenges. As a result, I will use the Appreciative Inquiry approach to focus the data collection on the positive and promising aspects of the functioning of the organization. Furthermore, because participants work in the same organization, it is difficult to guarantee complete confidentiality as they share information with me; please see information in the next section about how we can minimize this risk. The entire organization involved will benefit by using some of the data collected for the purpose of program planning and evaluation. The interview subjects' contributions may enhance the knowledge base and professionalism of Youth CARE. The results will add to knowledge about the impact of a diverse workforce in an organization.

Confidentiality:

This interview could take up to one hour. You will be asked to respond to ten questions about the opportunities and challenges of a diverse workforce. Your participation is completely voluntary and the risks associated with your participation are minimal. If, however, you experience any discomfort or do not wish to participate, you may opt out of this interview, choose to “pass” in response to any question, or withdraw from this interview at any time without any penalty.

The format I will use for the interview will depend on the number of the interviewees, and will influence the way I will record your responses. There will be note taking in various forms, and I will audio-record the interview. The records of the interviews will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed by January 30, 2015.

Confidentiality will be guaranteed by the researcher but because the study will be conducted in the same organization and most of the employees are familiar with one another, I cannot assure total confidentiality as-it is possible that others will attempt to discover the sources of various pieces of information. In order to mitigate this risk, I will not disclose identities and will keep the identities of all participants confidential. Whenever I use information gained from these participants, I will take every measure to ensure that the information cannot be used to identify the source nor be linked back to the source. Reports generated as a result of this interview may be used in composite stories, paraphrased wording, and/or direct quotes. By “composite story”, I mean that I may write a story that includes elements from many different individuals’ stories. Further, I will ask individual participants to respect the privacy of others but cannot enforce it. Finally, you should keep this risk in mind as you share your stories and responses with me in the interview.

Again, I will keep any information obtained in connection with this research study confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. I will take great care to protect the confidential nature of my data, by scrubbing findings of identifiers. I will store my transcripts and data in a secure location in my home office. I and my research advisor will be only persons who will have access to it during the research period. The data will be kept for approximately six months and will be destroyed in January 2015. The report will be shared with the organization in order to enhance program planning and evaluation and all identifiable markers will be removed.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without any negative consequences for yourself, your relationship with Youth CARE of Minnesota or with St. Catherine University.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any question please feel free to contact me, Abraham Bah at 612-203-1829 or abbah@stkate.edu. If you have other questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Sharon Radd, Research advisor at 612-600-5420 or siradd@stkate.edu or the St. Catherine University’s IRB Chair, John Schmitt 651-690-7739; isschmitt@stkate.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study.

I consent to participate in the study and agreed to be audio-taped.

Signature of Participant

Date

Abraham B. Bah

July 21, 2014

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix B

Senior Management Questionnaire

What is your position in the organization?

Can you please tell me your employment history with this organization?

From your leadership experiences, can you think about and describe the best diversity experience you have had with this organization?

Describe a challenging situation related to diversity you have faced as a leader working with this organization and what strategies did you use to address the situation?

Related to the diversity of this organization, what cultural dynamics and opportunities encourage you to stay as a leader.

What about the organization's cultural diversity do you value most?

In your position as a manager or leader, what have you done to bring about a diverse workforce?

What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments that are shaping the future of diversity of this organization?

In your position, what could or do you do to bring about small changes in a diverse workforce that brings the best out of them?

As a manager or leader, what do you do to encourage teamwork among co-workers and middle level workers?

Middle Senior Questionnaire

What is your position in the organization?

From your experience with this organization, can you please tell me your employment history?

Describe a challenging situation you were face with relating to diversity and what strategies did you use or advise upper management to do.

In your position as a middle manager or leader, what have you done to bring about diverse workforce?

What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments that will shape the future of this organization when it comes to diversity?

What about the organization's cultural diversity do you as a middle manager as value the most?

As a middle management or leader, what do you hope to contribute to this diverse workforce?

As a middle management or leader, what small change could you make right now that would bring out best out of base line employees.

As a middle management or leader, there are inevitably high points and low points, successes and frustration when it comes to diversity. What stands out for you as a high or low points, successes or frustration?

What else could or shouldupper and middle managements do best encourage and support a diverse working environment?

Base Line Employees

What is your position in the organization?

From your experience with this organization, can you please tell me your employment history?

What motivated you to work for this organization and what did you think you bring that that makes a difference?

For any employee, there are inevitably high points and low points, successes and frustration when it comes to diversity. What stands out for you as a high or low points, successes or frustration?

- a) Describe a challenging situation related to diversity you have faced while working with this organization and what did you do?
- b) Describe the best situation you have experience related to diversity while working with this organization. What made it so great?
- c) What about the organization's cultural diversity do you value the most? What should be done to encourage such practice?
- d) As an employee of this organization, what do you hope to contribute to this diverse workforce?

What areas you feel most that the organization could use effectively to improve the quality of diverse workforce?

- a) What do you think upper and middle management should do to encourage diversity?
- b) What small changes would you like to make right now that would promote teamwork and bring about a successful outcome among co-workers?

What do you consider some of the most significant trends, events, and developments that will shape the future of this organization when it comes to diversity?