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Human resources role in redefining the workplace diversity

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the role of human resources in redefining workplace diversity via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, a secure and known environment helps neurodivergent people to exhibit their skills to their maximum. In conclusion, Programs like 'Autism at work' and 'Neurodiversity hub' should be more accelerated and furthermore, platforms should be open for the neurodivergent population to be part of a diverse workforce.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, Neuro diversity, Inclusion.

El papel de los recursos humanos en la redefinición de la diversidad en el lugar de trabajo

Resumen

El estudio tiene como objetivo investigar el papel de los recursos humanos en la redefinición de la diversidad en el lugar de trabajo a través de métodos comparativos de investigación cualitativa. Como resultado, un entorno seguro y conocido ayuda a las personas neurodivergentes a exhibir sus habilidades al máximo. En conclusión, los programas como "Autismo en el trabajo" y "Centro de neurodiversidad" deberían acelerarse y, además, deberían abrirse plataformas para que la población neurodivergente forme parte de una fuerza laboral diversa.

Palabras clave: Diversidad, Inclusión, Neuro diversidad, Inclusión.

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity means differences, recognizing these differences, accepting and respecting them. Diversity means acceptance of the norm that each and every individual is characterized by unique attributes and different attributes put together make a diverse population. Over time, diversity has been adding new content into its dimensions. It has been a topic of discussion and research in all the countries with a high percentage of immigrations and globally developed or developing economies including UAE, USA, Japan, India, and Canada. Traditionally diversity is categorized into the areas of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and geographical areas. 'Diversity' term started getting used widely by the 1990s. From the time researchers started working on topic diversity, a lot of definitions have been evolved on what is diversity? or who or what becomes the part of diversity? Before the initiation of diversity as the research focus area, researchers had paid attention to the topics of women in management since the 1970s. Companies and HR were extending the scale of diversity by adding new variables of physical disability, religious beliefs, and educational background. The following figure represents a common diversity category as in the workplace.

Fig. 1: Common Diversity Categories in a Workplace

Organizations started focusing on having a culturally diverse workforce to compete in a highly competitive market. According to ROBERSON, RYAN & RAGINS (2017), there are six reasons for an organization to be culturally diverse to achieve organizational competitiveness. The six reasons are:

a. Cost

b. Resource Acquisition

c. Marketing

d. Creativity

e. Problem-solving

f. System Flexibility

As per Alan Joyce, CEO Qantas Airlines, Australia (2017), their diverse environment and very inclusive culture generated a better strategy, better risk management, better debates, [and] better outcomes. To avoid the risk of failure in the future, managers should recognize and empower a diverse workforce. Workplace diversity is today's reality. Increasing globalization requires people from various dimensions of diversity to work together in a worldwide economy.

Organizations need to follow the proactive approach in grasping the diversity (ANNE & MCMAHON, 2018; AHMAD & AHMAD, 2019).

The term Diversity is now part of organizational strategic objectives. Today in the Millennium workplace, Diversity has taken a new place or drastic shift in its dimensions (SUTHERLAND, 2016). Even Apple's philosophy on diversity also goes along with Joyce, CEO Qantas Airlines Australia. Their ideology is beyond the concept of demography. Apple believes in the Diversity of Thinking. Apple Inc. believes that innovation comes with diversity. HCL technologies have the same doctrine on diversity and sustainability. HCL goes with the principle that higher diversity leads to multiple solutions for business issues, innovations and ideas for the customer as per Srimathi Shiva Shankar, VP for HCL Tech. The topic of Diversity is most talked about among corporate political and legal areas. Today in a competitive market, being culturally diverse within the organization can serve as a competitive edge to make a mark in global markets and highly diverse labor markets. Under the diverse climate, the organization's culture is more creative and open to change (RICHMAN, 2018).

Inclusion refers to equal participation without any biases or favoritism towards any group or individual. It involves providing the feeling of belongingness and as a valuable part of an organization. It refers to the engagement of ideas, talents, experiences, behavior, and knowledge of diverse groups and individuals within the organizational

framework to get the competitive advantage of diversity. It is more involved in employee engagement for reaping out the talent creativity, opinions, work methodology from a group of different demographics and abilities. Properly integrated Inclusion at appropriate levels of the organization can lead to organizational development (AHMAD & SAHAR, 2019; PATRICK & KUMAR, 2012).

Senior management has to make sure not only for equal employment opportunities but also to ensure that nothing roots up on the basis of differences between demographics, social, cultural or abilities of the individuals. According to WENGER (2018), inclusion relates to if an employee identifies himself as a valuable part of the organization or not. This feeling of belongingness can be measured from their level of satisfaction under employee engagement. It relates to the full participation of individuals with their unique characteristics. Developing a culture of inclusion requires a set of leadership, skills of awareness, flexibility, open to change and communication. Inclusion has to be integrated as part of the strategic processes at three different levels (KOPELSON, 2015):

1. At the organization level

2. At interpersonal level

The following figure represents the outcomes of integrated inclusion at above mention three different levels of an organization.

At Organizational level	At interpersonal level	At Individual level
• Senior management is aware of D&I philosophies • development of an inclusive organization cuture • creating a sense of belongingness and Open Communication path • fair recruitment, promotion and professional development processes	• Encourage the feeling of acceptance • Cultivates the behaviour to treat all employees with dignity • respect and recognition to all ideas and innovations • Stimulating employee engagement in decision making • Awareness about D&I practices as part of organization vission and values	• Increase in self-confidence and esteem • increase in productivity and performance • higher employee satisfaction • benefits from collaborative or team work • platform for innovative and creative ideas to developed

Fig. 2: Outcomes of Properly Integrated Inclusion

Organizations with inclusive culture are more like to achieve their financial targets, high performances, innovations and better productivity results. In present times, the application of diversity and inclusion can yield better results and one step more towards corporate social responsibility if the term diversity and inclusion are extended or redefine to neurodiversity and inclusion (DILLON, 2018: HEMMATI & MOHAMMADKHANI, 2015).

Neuro diversity refers to identification, recognition, and acceptance of different neurological conditions at the workplace. In simple words, accepting of the fact that it is not compulsory that we all should think alike. The concept of neurodiversity is not a new one. In the late 1990's the concept of neologism originated as a challenge to advocate the views on neurological differences and its acceptance as a part of the cluster- Diversity & Inclusion along with the dimensions of

gender, age, nationality, ethnicity or disability status. It is believed that American journalist Harney Blume was first to use the term Neurodiversity in print in 1998. Since then, the term has not progressed that much as a part of research in management areas. Although under medical practices, various dimensions have been recognized for the neurodiversity population of people with cognitive variations and proven also there is no correlation between intelligence and various neurological conditions present in human beings. Certain neurological variations which are part of today workplace are (GEORGE & ZOE, 2013; AHMAD & AHMAD, 2018).

1. Asperger's & Autism under ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

2. ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

3. Dyslexia

4. Dyspraxia

Population with cognitive variations are often termed as neurodivergent population. Each of a neurodivergent condition has its own strength which could be capitalized by the organization to tap their talents. Neurodiversity population generally exhibits the following traits adding value to organization culture:

1. Preference of work over politics

2. Reliability and honesty towards work

3. Analysis skills

4. Photographic memory

5. Focus oriented to the completion of the task

6. Routine oriented

Certain areas of strength are presented below:

Table 1: Strength of Neurodivergent Population

#	Neurological condition	Strengths at work
1	ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), Asperger's	Analytical thinkers, logical reasoning, problem-solving, able to retain information for a longer period of time with details, technology-driven, highly focused
2	ADHD(Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)	They can push boundaries in creativity, problem-solving, innovative ideas
3	Dyslexia	Creativity, problem-solving, identifying patterns generated, reasoning skills
4	Dyspraxia	Broader thinkers, problem solvers because of reasoning skills, pattern spotters in issues

Most organizations do not consider the strategic importance of considering neurodiversity as a part of the diverse employee population because of the potential challenges at work they might have to face. To overcome these challenges, HR processes need to be restructured to support the growth of the neurodivergent population. Now, the organization globally and across different sectors are working to include neurodiversity as part of their company's philosophies. But still, their inclusion is a milestone to be achieved. Only 10% of organizations are able to create a completely inclusive environment for the neurodivergent population. As a part of Diversity and inclusion, all managers are trained on driving the talents from a diverse workforce, still, the unique abilities of neurodivergent individuals go in vain. They end up with part-time jobs or jobs undermining their talents.

This notion completely goes against the Neurodiversity at the workplace. 80% of the educated neurodivergent population which wants to work is either unemployed or underemployed (Sources UN News). Although it is not feasible for all businesses to achieve neurodiversity & inclusion by making adjustments to their organization recruitment processes and supporting system. In the technology sector, some companies are able to restructure their HR processes in order to attract and include neurodiverse talent in their workforce. Companies like SAP, Microsoft Corp., DXC. Technologies and Ernst & Young LLP are on the forefront to support neurodivergent talent. These companies are able to improve their functioning not only

in terms of productivity but also efficiency The following table shows steps or measures taken by certain companies to encourage neurodiversity.

Table 2: Companies supporting Neurodiversity

#	Companies	Programs Launched
1	SAP	Launched a program 'Autism at work' in 2013 across 12 countries and had more than 140 employees with Autism.
2	Microsoft Corp.	A launched program like Ability hiring events, April 2015. Organized Autism at work virtual career fair.
3	EY	Working on developing a neurodiversity center of excellence
4	DXC. technology	Launched a program The Dandelion program to build IT skills and career for the neurodiverse population especially Autistic, established Neurodiversity hub in collaboration with other corporates with different universities around the world

The other companies named in supporting neurodiversity are Willis Towers Watson, Ford, Google, JPMorgan, and Amazon. These organizations have identified the unique characteristics of innovation, creativity, detailing, analytical skills and looking into a big picture of people with cognitive variations. They were able to completely redesign their recruitment, selection, hiring and training processes to attract and drive neurodiverse talent to organizational sustainability. These organizations have turned the challenges of having neurodiversity into new opportunities to attain a competitive edge in a

highly competitive market. They believe in successful talent management starts with the appropriate hiring process at HR. HR plays an important role in redefining diversity in terms of neurodiversity.

Recruitment steps followed in these companies:

1. The term neurodiversity is added to the company's employment strategies.

2. HR professionals started with identifying the source of neurodivergent candidates.

3. Most of the technological companies like SAP, Microsoft and HPE are conducting summer camps and providing internships for neurodivergent students.

4. These students, who are keen to learn technologies, spend a period of time to know the work they are best at.

5. It provides them an opportunity to work in an inclusive environment with the non-neurological workforce.

6. They have aligned a mentor to provide guidance throughout their training program.

7.   After their graduation, they can return to these places as a prospective job candidate.

8. Traditional interview and selection methodologies are ruled out.

9. Continuous training is provided in a secure environment for each individual to develop professionally.

Here comes the role of the functional manager to work in alignment with the HR manager. Functional managers need to work along with talent management professionals to define the job description to attract the neurodivergent population, recruiting and screening of these candidates. The job description should be more skills-based to identify the unique qualities of the candidate. Testing onboard and interview skills could be accommodated to the needs of each individual. For example, the test could be printed on colored paper with bold and bigger font sizes. It makes easy to do the exam for people sensitive to visuals. Training could be provided on skills to be tested prior to the interview. A secure and known environment helps neurodivergent people to exhibit their skills to their maximum. Extra time could be provided to finish the tasks. Providing such changes to their recruitment process, companies are able to tap the benefits of neurodivergent talent. The following table shows some of the successful cases of hiring neurodiverse talent and how they have added

value to the company's productivity with their innovative ideas and looking at each issue from a different perspective every time.

Table 3: Result of Changes in the Recruitment Process

#	Companies	Case study	Impact	Sources
1	SAP	Mark Jessen, IT Technology consultant at SAP Global network.	Great return on investment, better managers, analytical mindsets, positive impact on SAP culture	SAP culture & identity publication
2	Microsoft	Philip Jarvis, Microsoft engineer with Asperger's syndrome	Problem-solving, picking at problem continuously until a creative solution is formed	Microsoft Autism hiring program, 2018
3	DXC Technology	More than 55 people on the Autism spectrum as an employee working as software experts in different areas for private and government clients	Excellent quality of work, innovation is taken to another level, broader vision of workforce, new communication skills learned by managers and co-workers	DXC dandelion program, Nov 2017
4	EY (Ernst &Young LLP)	Sam Briefer-Accounts support associate	Excellent in innovation, training time cut down to half, identified improvement in process, comparable work productivity	EY publications, May 2018

These companies have been able to integrate neurodivergent talent with a typical in the neurological workforce. Still, it is just one step towards neurodiversity with programs like Autism at work and Neurodiversity hub. Still, companies around the world need to do a lot of development in their HR vision to include the neurodivergent

population in their talent pool. Based on the steps and initiatives taken by the above-mentioned companies in their diversity and inclusion programs, a framework is recommended for HR professionals to apply in their process of talent management.

Here is the recommended framework on Neurodiversity & Inclusion integration to help the HR firm in recruiting, selection, training, and development of the Neurodiverse talent. By bringing certain changes that are economical on cost can bring a great impact on the organization from neurodiversity.
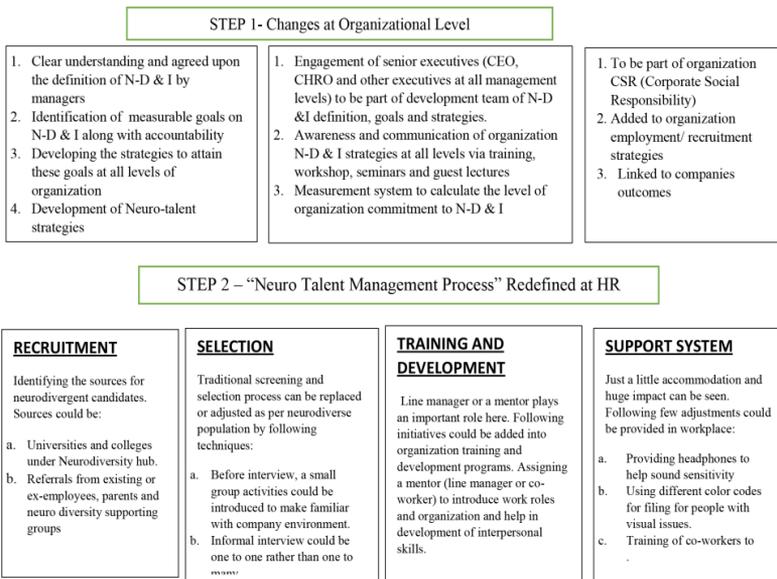
STEP 1- Changes at Organizational Level

1. Clear understanding and agreed upon the definition of N-D & I by managers
2. Identification of measurable goals on N-D & I along with accountability
3. Developing the strategies to attain these goals at all levels of organization
4. Development of Neuro-talent strategies

1. Engagement of senior executives (CEO, CHRO and other executives at all management levels) to be part of development team of N-D &I definition, goals and strategies.
2. Awareness and communication of organization N-D & I strategies at all levels via training, workshop, seminars and guest lectures
3. Measurement system to calculate the level of organization commitment to N-D & I

1. To be part of organization CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)
2. Added to organization employment/ recruitment strategies
3. Linked to companies outcomes

STEP 2 – "Neuro Talent Management Process" Redefined at HR

RECRUITMENT

Identifying the sources for neurodivergent candidates. Sources could be:

a. Universities and colleges under Neurodiversity hub.
b. Referrals from existing or ex-employees, parents and neuro diversity supporting groups

SELECTION

Traditional screening and selection process can be replaced or adjusted as per neurodiverse population by following techniques:

a. Before interview, a small group activities could be introduced to make familiar with company environment.
b. Informal interview could be one to one rather than one to many

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Line manager or a mentor plays an important role here. Following initiatives could be added into organization training and development programs. Assigning a mentor (line manager or co-worker) to introduce work roles and organization and help in development of interpersonal skills.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

Just a little accommodation and huge impact can be seen. Following few adjustments could be provided in workplace:

a. Providing headphones to help sound sensitivity
b. Using different color codes for filing for people with visual issues.
c. Training of co-workers to .

Fig. 3: Recommended framework on Neurodiversity & Inclusion integration

5. CONCLUSION

It is not easy for companies to restructure their Job descriptions. The theory mentioned above tries to advocate neurodiversity and its complete inclusion. It suggests HR processes to be reviewed and Neurodiversity to be attached to organization CSR. The companies can set the target for neurodiversity inclusion for each year. It can start with routine-based job restructuring. Companies who are willing to take initiatives on becoming the part of Neurodiversity inclusion can follow the path of companies who are already into this mission. Programs like 'Autism at work' and 'Neurodiversity hub' should be more accelerated and furthermore, platforms should be open for the neurodivergent population to be part of a diverse workforce. HR professionals can play an important role by making the N-D & I as part organization recruitment process and forming HR strategies to achieve N-D & I targets of the organization.

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