1. Why should the Organizations care about Diversity?

In the last decades, several scholars have addressed the diversity issue in different perspectives\(^1\), and among them J. Fink, D. Pastore and H. Riemer (2003) who proposed a framework of managing diversity that distinguishes between “non-compliant” organizations at its lowest end, and “pro-active” ones at its highest end, going through “compliant” and “reactive”. Their framework is adapted hereafter:

The framework suggests that Diversity would go from a liability to an asset for the organizations that move their diversity management from non-compliant to pro-active. The non-compliant organizations would eventually face the threats imposed by diversity, while for the pro-active ones many Employees at various levels are involved in decision-

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\(^1\) Cox, T.H., Jr. “the multicultural organization” – Academy of management executive 5, no. 2 - 1991.  
DeSensi, J. T. “understanding multiculturalism and valuing diversity: a theoretical perspective”. Quest 1995…
making. The latter organizations are those which will profit from their management of diversity and ripe their opportunities\(^2\).

The interest in the diversity management stems from the fact that diversity in the workplace is an issue of concern across the organizations as it can bring benefits or challenges to them, and as such would directly influence their performance. That is why many scholars have addressed the issue with the intent to enrich our understanding of its dynamics.

The purpose of this paper is to stress on the importance of having our organizations’ leaders caring more about accommodating their team members’ diversity to better manage retaining the good people and attracting more new ones (and why not for that matter the best people in their sectors) as long as their long term success depends on it, more than on their financial resources and operating competencies.

**2. Is diversity a threat or an opportunity for organizations?**

Diversity is a growing reality that organizations, especially the large ones, need to address explicitly, and no more in a masked way through their culture. It should be acknowledged, appreciated and dealt with as a source of richness, creativity and cross cultural recognition. It is so as organizations do not normally have homogeneous human resources, the same profile of consumers, similar suppliers…

Managing diversity is not just a social, moral or conscience issue as it affects directly the performance and results of the organizations. Consider all the failed marketing attempts, destroyed relationships, conflicts, lost talent, and misunderstanding that have resulted from not understanding or appreciating diversity. This pushes the stakeholders to look at how the organizations are handling their diversity issues, rewarding the ones dealing correctly with it and turning their back to the others.

Managing diversity means acknowledging people’s differences and recognizing these differences as valuable; it enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Among the consequences of non-diversity at the workforce level are the exclusion of portions of the population with risks of social gaps, stereotyping, fundamentalism leading to civil unrest (e.g. riots in French sub urban areas) and political confrontations (e.g. immigration laws in Europe and USA).

Across the board, successful businesses are anticipating and capitalizing on the swiftly rising proportion of minority, immigrants, female and older workers; and some are even beginning to capitalize on the talents of the disabled.

\(^2\) It is to be noted that the framework does not suggest that the different diversity management practices are mutually exclusive.
What is to be noted is that when people think of diversity, they think first of ethnicity and race, and then gender. However, diversity is much broader than that; it is otherness, or those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the group to which we belong - yet present in other individuals and groups.

3. The reasons behind the rise of diversity

- **Globalization**
  Globalization has resulted in the removal of barriers between markets allowing a free flow of products/services/skills/ideas/… Organizations found an opportunity to expand their operations worldwide. Many Organizations came under the pressure of new competitors and they had to work with new types of consumers and different human resources; they were unprepared to face the diversity both within their branches and in their markets.

- **Migration**
  On the one hand, developed regions of the world, such as North America and Western Europe, are experiencing low birth rates, decreasing cohorts of young people, and declining ratios of workers to retirees (fewer workers supporting increasing numbers of retirees). In order to sustain their current levels of economic activities, these countries need to import immigrants to work. On the other hand, developing regions of the world are experiencing a completely opposite trend, with unprecedented growth in the number of young people due to high birth rates, improved medical conditions, and decreased infant mortality. This creates very large cohorts of young people who are looking for jobs. These countries cannot support such large numbers of young job seekers, so they need to emigrate in order to find jobs for themselves and to support their families.

Case in point for the developed countries: Italy’s population is currently around 57 million. It is projected to decrease to about 41 million by the year 2050 because of low birth rates. In order to sustain its current economic activities, Italy will need to bring in about 350,000 immigrants yearly. We see similar trends in Germany, Belgium, and France—they are all likely to experience population declines if they don’t continue to accept immigrants.

An example of the situation in developing countries is Mexico: every year, the same number of people reaches adulthood in Mexico as in the United States, but the Mexican economy is one-tenth the size of the United States’ economy. Obviously, these young people must look for jobs outside of their country.

So, if you put together these two trends—the push from the developing countries and the pull from the developed countries—you can see that the workforce is becoming increasingly diverse all over the world. In addition, advances in equal rights legislation around the world now force work organizations to be more accommodating of workers who have traditionally been excluded from the workforce.
• **Women’s work**
The family structure (tasks of members, size, education and consumption patterns) has changed with an increase in the number of active women. Some professions that used to be males dominated have seen female joining in, and new rules and processes modifications were introduced.

• **Aging population**
The aging population and the development of health care are increasing the number of seniors staying active, increasing thus the median workers’ age... This explains why the work environment is being adapted to the old aged workers and why many processes have been modified to include the senior profiles. Even productivity targets and career plans are being reviewed.

Moreover, beyond the burdens to the economy of underutilizing older workers and supporting older non-workers, many economists are already predicting a shortage of skilled workers resulting in a need to recruit and retain older workers who possess valuable skills. From a practical point of view, Organizations are already becoming increasingly dependent on older workers. Gordon F. Shea, author of *Managing Older Employees*, predicted that for every six new entrants into the job market in 1990, there will be only five at the beginning of the 21st century, representing a shortage of millions of workers in the United States and in many European countries.

• **Political diversity**

In most Organizations Employees have different political ideas, and eventually affiliations. This is a source of conflict among them, especially when they are compelled to make decisions regarding crucial national actions, such as petitions, strikes, and public demonstrations.

• **Corporate structure change (SCM, outsourcing, global operations)**

Under the pressure of competition, many Organizations are moving their production facilities to third world countries to enjoy cheaper labor or to get closer to raw material sources, increasing the diversity among its workforce.

• **Status diversity (expatriates v/s locals)**

The expansion of the businesses at the international level and the mobility of human resources resulted in the presence of expatriate and local employees working side by side with all the different working conditions (salary, fringe benefits and work period) and promotion prospects that might lead to frustration and confrontation.

• **Caste diversity**

In many countries, the caste system and the presence in the same department of persons belonging to different castes might be lived.
Diversity Issues and challenges

During the 19th century, most ideologies (fascism, communism, national socialism,…) tried to suppress the diversity and focused on a common aim because they feared that specific problems to different groups weaken the country and its cohesion. Based on assumptions that differences mean weakness and homogeneity leads to strong bonds, they used repression, violence and even extermination to avoid the diversity but failed to impose common standards and erase the differences.

At the business level, the resistance to diversity comes usually from the dominant group wishing to keep its dominance and by management because of the extra cost diversity usually creates for training, conflict resolution and process adaptation.

Proving that diversity is manageable; it is no more a choice, it is a must imposed to organizations. They have to handle diversity and use it smartly to enhance creativity, mutual understanding of differences and ability to expand its operations to new markets.

Managing diversity focuses on maximizing the ability of all employees to contribute to organizational goals. Ignoring diversity issues costs time, money, and efficiency. Some of the consequences can include unhealthy tensions between people of differing gender, race, ethnicity, age, abilities, etc.; loss of productivity because of increased conflict; inability to attract and retain talented people of all kinds; complaints and legal actions; and inability to retain women and people of color, resulting in lost investments in recruitment and training.

4. What is Diversity at the Workplace?

At the workplace, people are different in their perceptions, aspirations and drives, and, as such, would respond differently to the stimuli of their Seniors when it comes to directing their performance. They are different due to their gender, culture, sex, age, ethnicity, academic background, experiences, lifestyles, nationality, social and political affiliation, talent and skills… In fact, the list goes on longer (let alone that the diversity triggers are not static), though it would be beneficial to note that the diversity elements could be categorized in three classes (Dianah Worman 2005):

- Social diversity: age, ethics, gender…
- Value diversity: psychological differences in personality and attitude
- Informational diversity: education, functional tenure in the organization…

Above renders it not easy to fully grasp the full diversity dynamics in any organization, and some people in the organization are so different from some others that managing the Employees in a standard manner is almost impossible. For that reason, people should not be molded in the organization’s culture but should rather be managed, almost individually, to permit exploiting what their diversity offers, such as:
Cost effectiveness: using foreigners at lower cost
Enhancing creativity and motivation: exploiting the Employees different mindsets.

5. What is diversity management?

Diversity management in general consists of taking proactive actions pertaining to the organization’s climate that are capable of minimizing the threats of diversity and of maximizing its opportunities. Thus, it requires understanding that though diversity means differences, it encompasses similarities.

As the trend toward team work is continuously increasing, pushing people to work more and better together would profit the organization and the People as each Employee would better manage then taking advantage of the team pluses and alleviating its minuses. This of course requires that the differences between the People be harnessed and the team avoids being propelled by its members’ differences. Hence, diversity at the workplace would provide a wider pool of competencies when properly managed, and would decrease team cohesion and light internal conflicts when it is not. In fact, an organization that would succeed in managing its diversity would score on many fronts. It would:

- Secure better interpersonal communication between its People
- Increase creativity and innovation
- Manage recruiting and retaining better People
- Improve its People performance for the satisfaction of all its stakeholders.

6. Some actions to consider to improve on managing diversity

In general, diversity management requires accomplishing any or both of the following:

- Acceptance and usage of People differences
- Blending People

Because people would remain different, while the organization would work on blending its people, most of its diversity management actions would look for helping its People witnessing and accepting their differences, as well as taking advantage of their differences.

Among the many actions that can be considered by the Leaders to improve on their organizations diversity management, the following are stressed on:

Comming themselves to managing diversity
Especially by looking for the good of all, not just theirs, and by:

- Tolerating ambiguity and explaining diversity away
- Tolerating diversity and helping their People accepting it as a fact of life
- Fostering mutual adaptation of their People to achieve their common interests by capitalizing on change.

**Gaining People commitment:**

The more committed People are, the more their performance. For Rijamampiana and Carmichael (2005), Employees commitment has three levels: Obligation, Belonging and Ownership. To them, Organizations need to create first an attitude of Ownership among the Employees by accepting sharing the business outcomes (success and failures) with the Employees. Of course, this is not a new practice in many Organizations (bonus, profit sharing and other benefit sharing schemes). The issue is however to make sure that such schemes are transparent\(^3\) and fair\(^4\).

**Promoting Inclusion**

Promoting inclusion (i.e. belonging) is needed to foster mutual respect among Employees and requires securing the right to speak out and to advocate personal demands. The Leaders need to be strongly convinced that their People are all capable to adapt to change and to get included in the team. So, helping People building responsibility and accountability would prove beneficial.

**Increasing People Empowerment**

That can be relatively attained through the delegation of more responsibilities and authorities down the hierarchy, and the increase of the occasions of learning for the Employees and enhancing the independence among them.

**Facilitating Family spirit**

Such can be done by:

- Helping building trust among the People
- Facilitating communication
- Clarifying and rendering explicit the vision and objectives of the Organization
- Creating an atmosphere of competence sharing and fostering trust.

**Listening more to show the Employees appreciation**

By being more fully engaged in listening:

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\(^3\) That for instance the bonus is a performance bonus and not a management discretionary one.

\(^4\) Left away from the power struggles in the Organization for example.
• Beginning by understanding
• Giving time
• Getting concerned
• Soliciting feedback.

Appreciating diversity

Appreciating diversity requires investing time and effort. But it can be helped through:
• Hiring People from different yards
• Encouraging People to speak out their differences
• Being patient and installing mutual support between the People
• Seeking common grounds
• Accepting taking risks.

7. Case of Lebanon

In Lebanon a person’s religious belief is the main feature of diversity in the society as political parties, residential areas, education and health services are often divided along religious lines. In fact, the strong ties between individuals and their religious communities have prevailed for many centuries starting under the Ottoman empire - which gave large autonomy to local governors who used religion either to gain recognition or to divide the population under their rule to smaller competing groups.

More so, the influence of religion has increased during the past three decades due to the absence of a central state, witnessed during the civil war, that drove citizens to join groups with similar features to best defend their interests. Nowadays, religious discrimination is at its highest in the public sector where special regulations put in place at the beginning of the 20th century aim at ensuring a fair representation of all religious groups in the state administration and avoiding the exclusion of minorities.

In Lebanon, managing this religious diversity has turned into a nightmare. Since 1920, recruiting and promoting public servants has followed a quota system and has been balanced according to the employees’ religious beliefs. In many jobs the shortage of candidates for recruitment or promotion from certain religious communities has led to the adoption of positive discrimination. Yet this special procedure has not been followed by continuous training for the recruits, to ensure that they have been gaining crucial skills for the job. As a result of this, the quality of the services delivered by the public sector deteriorated, performance measurement became irrelevant, job related rewards and penalties were eliminated to avoid hurting the equilibrium, motivation of employees went down and internal conflicts increased with every employee trying to find support from a religious or political leader belonging to his community.
Fortunately however, the private sector has been much less affected by the religious diversity problems because the shareholders tend to focus more on the employees’ qualification for the job more than on their religious backgrounds.

For this reason, the Lebanese private sector has been able to withstand the pressures of religious discrimination (while capitalizing on its diverse workforce) and has prospered, while the public sector has become flooded with corruption and currently lacks efficiency and credibility. In view of that, many efforts are been put by the Lebanese government towards privatizing many services in the public sector.

Conclusion

For the long term success, the Organizations need to get each of their Employees giving their best at the workplace, as if the Organization was theirs. And the only way to come to that is for the Organizations to find ways through which each of their Employees is valued to their own merits, regardless of their differences with the others.

When diversity is imposed and regulated, it becomes a liability for the Organizations while it is a valuable asset if it is managed properly.

That is the challenge for the pro-active leaders, especially in a country like ours where Employees have many good reasons to feel that they have the right to be different due to our ongoing country and region concerns. Our leaders need to appreciate the pluses that our diversity brings in, not only tolerate and manage it.

That takes a lot of effort and understanding. But not only our Organizations deserve it, our People do too. To put it in a nutshell, “True Leaders must understand deeply the hurts and bruises, joys and struggles, aims and aspirations of their constituents” (A. Kouzes and B. Power – 1993).

Unless the leaders have the best interest of their Employees at heart, they cannot prevail. So, they need to drift somewhat their focus from themselves to cater more and better for their constituents. They should do that more than working on enhancing their directorship status and impact, which in fact cannot be gained unless given to them by their constituents.

Let’s hope then that our leaders would look for working more on appreciating their constituents and building up their credibility with them, especially through being:

- More visible and reachable
- Concerned by their constituents needs, interests and aspirations more than theirs
- Supportive and helping their constituents win
- Closer to the action.

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5 That is our Employees, Suppliers, Clients and the other stakeholders.
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