

The Importance of Effective Cultural Diversity Training Programmes for Hotels

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Abstract

This paper aims to establish the importance of implementing cultural diversity training programmes in South African hotels in order to assist both manager and general staff better deal with culturally associated dilemmas faced in the working environment. The paper reports on the extent of cultural diversity within South African hotels by exploring the various dimensions of cultural diversity found within the hotel workforce, the organisational stance on cultural diversity as well as cultural diversity challenges faced by both managers and general employees. There have been many studies conducted in continents such as North America and Europe on the importance of cultural diversity, but few studies have been conducted on the importance of management participation within these studies (Reynold, Raham, & Bradetich, 2013: 430). Managers participation in cultural diversity training is then vital in order to be sensitive to cultural differences so that they can review their own perceptions and behaviours making it easier to manage their diverse employees more efficiently, otherwise these cultural barriers may cause discomfort and stress for the judged party involved (Baum, Devine & Hearn, 2007). Using quantitative approach a five- point Likert – scale questionnaire was utilized in order to provide clarity on the views of managers and employees in regards to cultural diversity and the challenges both parties faced.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural workforce diversity is a term that has become of great importance in South Africa since policies such as Black Economic Empowerment and affirmative action which are artificial interventions aimed at giving management a chance to correct an imbalance, an injustice, mistake or outright discrimination by giving previously disadvantaged racial groups economic privileges. The forced integration has resulted in conflict due to the lack of skilled leadership within companies in the discipline of diversity management. With the increasingly changing demographics of the South African population, managers and employees are then finding it harder to deal with workforce diversity issues such as, misunderstandings which arise from stereotyping where one tends to reduce his or her own uncertainty when it comes to understanding different cultures , language barriers which hinder communication caused by the vast amount of official languages found in South Africa, not forgetting the discomfort that can occur during interracial interactions (Avery, Richeson, Hebl & Ambady 2009:1382-193; Shelton, Dovidio, Hebl & Richeson, 2010:21-38).

Previous research has indicated managers' attitudes to be the reason why diversity management fails in the hospitality workplace (Furunes & Mykletun, 2007), as managers perceive diversity training as a tool to assist employees better interact with guests rather than a tool meant to assist manage cultural diversity dilemmas in the work environment. Therefore the main purpose of this study was to investigate the necessity of implementing an effective cultural diversity training programme within South African hotels that is tailored to assist both management and general employees with cultural diversity issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review explored the various dimensions of cultural diversity which includes research by Hofstede on how values in the workplace are influenced by culture; the results indicated that the values that differentiated countries can be

divided in four different dimensions: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980:14; Woodside & Martin, 2007:28).

Not forgetting the four layers of diversity, these four layers are a model that describes the concept of diversity (Gardenswartz, Cherbosque & Rowe, 2010:76).

The outer layer being the organizational layer is defined as management status, union affiliation, work location, seniority, divisional department, work content/field and functional level classification. Employees cannot influence this layer that much as the organization is in control of how these things work. The following layer is the external layer which is characterized by personal habits, recreational habits, religion, educational background, work experience, appearance, status, marital status, geographic location and income. These again are characteristic that can be influenced to some extent by the individual as they are real life choices of each person. (Washington, 2008:3)

The internal layers of diversity include characteristics that the individual has no control over since they are determined at birth. This layer consists of age, race, ethnicity, gender and physical ability. The core of the model is personality, which is seen as the traits and characteristics of a person that determine the behavior of a person to a certain extent. The model illustrates that diversity consists of many different characteristics of a person and that a manager of a multicultural work environment should be aware of these dimensions to be able to pull out the strengths and talents of each and every employee to support the organizations goals.

These studies were utilized in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities of diversity as a whole. Literature and past studies have indicated that organizations ability to compete or be successful depends on their ability to effectively manage cultural diversity in a workplace and communicate effectively across cultures (Okoro & Washington, 2012:58). To establish a need for cultural diversity training programmes, literature pertaining to the challenges faced within the working environment can be found. Literature depicts cultural diversity as a trigger to stereotyping; gathering individuals into groups according to their culture, age,

gender, colour, race, etc and opens the way to build incorrect expectations and prejudice (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather & Roberson, 2011:570-600; Dessler, 2014). While in any workplace it also increases the possibility of miscommunication, misunderstanding, perception problems and wrong interpretations, lack of trust, and different account of time urgency, particularly when making decisions (Luthans & Doh, 2011). Such barriers being the very same challenges this paper seeks to understand and rectify by highlighting the benefits of having an effective cultural diversity training programmes. Scholars such as George and Jones (2012:143) described the results of an effective cultural diversity training programmes as being able to:

- ❖ Breaking down stereotypes, inaccurate perceptions and attributes about individuals.
- ❖ Raising awareness concerning the different backgrounds, experiences and values of individuals.
- ❖ Managing conflict within the workplace.
- ❖ Raising mutual understanding about one's cultural orientation

From the literature review it can then be said that the forced integration has created uncertainty in the workforce, as management and employees do not possess the necessary skills to control the concept of cultural diversity management and its ethics, and so both managers and employees are finding it difficult to effectively practice cultural diversity management.

METHODS

The research study utilized a quantitative research approach which posed specific questions and measured the variables needed in order to facilitate the finding of answers (Creswell, 2007:4). A combination of stratified sampling and convenience sampling was used in order to select hotels that would have a greater chance of having cultural diversity training in their establishments. For this study a total number of 151 participants made up the sample size, 81 entry level employees formed part of the final sample size, while 70 managers participated in the study, the selection was based on the availability of the participants hence the difference in number of employees compared to those of the managers.

A questionnaire method of data collection was used, with the questions structured using closed-ended questions with the addition of opened-ended questions. The open-ended questions were utilized to give further clarity on some of the closed-ended questions asked. The management and staff satisfaction questionnaire was measured using a five- point Likert – scale technique for data collection. The questionnaire distributed comprised of four sections the first section focused on the demographic information of participants. The second section focused on the personal views of the participants when it came to cultural diversity, the third section was designed to establish the challenges the participants faced while working in a culturally diverse workforce. The fourth and last section of the questionnaire dealt with investigating the organizational stance of the participant's place of employment .The study utilized Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data. Further analysis of the results was conducted through the cross tabulation and filtration of the data, the results of the SPSS described through means of frequencies, pie charts and tables to allow the researcher to gain more insight of the data. The study utilized internal consistency reliability to calculate the extent to which the test items all reflect the same attribute, the reliability of the responses were calculated by Cronbach alpha.

FINDINGS

The paper explored the importance of having effective cultural diversity training programs for hotels by outlining the extent of diversity found in South African hotels as well as the challenges that come with having a culturally diverse workforce.

Table
1.1
Respo
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Work
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nment

Variable	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
In my department i have people who have different cultures, religions and social backgrounds.	80.1%	12.6%	7.3%
I communicate well with my colleagues even when they come from different cultural backgrounds.	92%	4.6%	3.3%
I do everything possible to understand my colleague's cultural backgrounds.	78.1%	11.9%	9.9%
Cultural diversity training is a needed tool in my organization.	76.8%	17.9%	5.3%
I experience forms of culturally based discrimination in my work environment.	39.7%	13.9%	46.3%

Cultural discrimination in the workplace affects my ability to do my job.	33.1%	18.5%	48.4%
My organization has cultural diversity training programs or innovations in place to help me better work in a multicultural workforce.	30.4%	20.5%	49%
The cultural diversity training or innovations provided effectively assist me in better handling any cultural diversity related dilemmas within my work environment.	41.7%	23.8%	34.4%

Table 1.1 gives an insight on the working environment of the participants in terms of cultural diversity. The results showed an indication that both managers and employees value working within a culturally diverse workforce with majority of the participants indicating their willingness to understand the various cultures they are surrounded by within their work environment and while also acknowledging the existence of the various cultures. It can also be noted that participants found cultural diversity training to be a needed tool in order to better deal with any cultural issues they faced.

From the analysis of the data the dominating challenge faced by both managers and employees was discrimination in the form of ethnic and racial differences. Such notions were noted from the open – ended questions which provided clarity on the scenarios participants experienced which are noted in Table 1.2. To further support the findings a study on the analysis of Zimbabwean hotel managers perspective on workforce diversity by Mkono (2010:306) highlighted that some employees are ethnocentric and resisted efforts to try and improve harmony with their co-workers while some ethnic minorities believed themselves to be superior by virtue of the military conquests of their ancestors. With South Africa still experiencing a relatively young democracy, it is not surprising that racial issues are still present.

Table 1.2 Incidents Pertaining to Discrimination in the Workplace

“Because i am a white man, i am told now and then by my employees that i am being racist when i try and reprimand them for something. They think just because of my skin colour i have right to call them to order”.
“Being a foreigner makes it hard to fit in at work because you are told you are a kwerekwere and treated funny”.
“Being called umlungo for being white or having "rich white people"because of my interests/hobbies”.
“Being Indian brings some form of discrimination especially when it comes to my appearance, they think its inappropriate and unprofessional”.
“Black people are unethical in their job, never able to finish their task on their own”.
“It is difficult as an afrikaaner in this country to do your job without being called a racist, when you try discipline staff as their manager they think you are doing so because they are black and you are white”.
“Like saying someone if he or she does something wrong it is because they are pedi or shangan”.
“when you are a sangoma it is hard for people to understand your life so they judge you saying you are witchcrafting them”.

The findings also indicated that although the sampled hotels did not have a definitive cultural diversity training program, celebrating heritage day in the work place was just one of the tools used to promote cultural diversity education, which was seen as sufficient according to the participants in assisting managers and employees with cultural diversity associated interactions.

IMPLICATIONS

The results gained from the study have shone a light on the implications of discrimination within the hotel working environment and the extent of the challenge it poses in terms of culturally diverse interactions. Racial and Ethnic discrimination have long been issues that appeared apparent in a country that battled with racial oppression that came with Apartheid. Although companies have implemented policies such as BEE and affirmative action as a way of eliminating discrimination, this study has shown that it has only succeeded in providing opportunities for the disadvantaged demographic groups rather than an understanding of the cultural

differences within the workforce. Therefore raising a need for literature that would better assist in educating individuals on coping mechanisms when faced with diversity related dilemmas within the South African context

CONCLUSIONS

South Africa has a diverse institutional and socio-cultural context, therefore this paper aimed at establishing the need for effective cultural diversity training programmes. Findings of the study showed that the South African hotel industry is a culturally diverse one with various cultural demographics being represented in the working environment. Although there may be 11 official languages in South Africa, communication was not a factor as the larger demographics of the study possessed the ability to speak more than one language. This revelation questioned the need for the implementation of cultural diversity training programmes, however the utilisation of informal cultural diversity training methods in order to educate employees on the various cultures in the working environment only dealt with certain dimensions of cultural diversity and failed to cover all aspects, hence discrimination and stereotyping were challenges faced by the participants.

The study itself was however faced with certain limitations, the literature review gathered was predominantly of European and North American origins, meaning the relativity of literature explored did not necessarily correlate with the cultural diversity composition of South Africa, as well as literature on cultural diversity training programmes within South Africa being limited therefore referencing on the topic had to be derived from human resource related research rather than hospitality based research. The distribution of the questionnaires was also problematic as some hotels feared the topic would result in their hotel being viewed less favourably due to the sensitivity of the research topic. Based on the findings of the study however, the researcher proposes that future cultural diversity training programmes to be developed be more topic specific, instead of generalizable. With cultural diversity consisting of numerous categories, each training programme needs to focus on educating both managers and employees about that specific subject matter. E.g having a race and ethnic sensitivity training which will assist both parties in understanding each other's racial and ethnic background and behaviour.

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