

Managing Cultural Diversity within an Organization: Carestream Health

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Abstract

The paper researches cultural diversity in a multinational company. It starts by defining cultural diversity and by pointing out its advantages and disadvantages. It then presents a survey on 35 employees of the Canadian company Carestream Health aiming at revealing their opinion on cultural diversity and their company's policy in this respect.

Key words: *cultural diversity, leadership, management, organizational culture, multicultural work environment*

Introduction

The theme of cultural diversity and its impact on companies worldwide has become a timely subject that I will address in this paper. It has become a movement and an instrument that companies use to add to their foundation, in the willingness to open the world, expand their business and bring people of any culture to work together in a common environment.

This paper focuses on ways that companies can integrate multiculturalism within their personalities, how to achieve this in a practical and financially rewarding way and how they have managed to use culture to benefit them and help them evolve.

This process is illustrated by a case study on Carestream Health company that, in my personal opinion, is an example of cross cultural environment. The subject of multiculturalism is treated there with respect and genuine interest in doing their best to conduct a harmonious and balanced working environment. Their leadership skills are clearly stated in the way they worked with that certain group of people.

To back up my research, I chose to interview 35 persons working for the same company, but having different nationalities, age, gender, or roles. The survey was designed to focus on employees' perception towards the multicultural environment in the company, to define their point of view regarding the level of satisfaction they have working in such place, the advantages and disadvantages they see, what is the position of the company facing a cultural diversity and especially which is the impact that cultural

diversity has on the individual, the team or the company as an entity and how to manage it in order to get the best results from each diverse team. The survey was build using open ended questions, where the participants filled in the answers with their thoughts, questions with multiple choices allowed, questions based on level of measurement and filter and contingency questions in order to guide them to provide the information needed for my research. The results of this qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive but helped me support the construction of the case study.

What is cultural diversity?

Traditionally speaking, cultural diversity encompasses two dimensions: ethnic belonging and nationality, which point directly to the individual's belonging to a specific culture. That is why "diversity" used to be called "cultural diversity". EU Racial Equality Directive and EU Employment Equality Directive stipulate that cultural diversity encompasses six dimensions – age, physical capabilities / disabilities, culture, sex, religion and sexual orientation.

Further classifications of cultural diversity can be found in scientific literature too: superficial diversity - age, sex, belonging to an ethnic group, religion, education and deep (hidden) diversity - culture values¹; main - race, ethnicity, sex, physical or cognitive abilities and secondary - individual's attitudes, mother tongue, social-economic status, education and professional experience dimensions of cultural diversity²; task-associated dimensions of cultural diversity - dependence of to a division, hierarchical level, duration of employment with the organization, professional group, knowledge, abilities and skills, experience, education and relationship-oriented dimensions - nationality, ethnic dependability, sex, age, religion, disability, race, attitude, values, personal qualities, social status.³

Advantages of cultural diversity in an organization

There are many arguments for creating a culturally diverse workforce. For instance, as the number of women, minorities, disabled etc. in the workforce increase, so will increase their influence as consumers. Hiring them, organizations will tap these niche markets.

Taking into account that all the segments of society have a stake in the development and prosperity of the society as a whole, the creation of a diverse workforce should be perceived as a social and moral imperative.

A further argument for creating a culturally diverse workforce is that diversity enhances creativity and innovation and therefore it produces

advantages.

There is no doubt that diversity helps organizations for entering the international arena. Also, diverse teams can make it possible to enhance flexibility and rapid response to change.

By capitalizing on the potential benefits of diversity, organizations will have added value and competitive advantages over organizations which do not respond to this challenge.

If people feel valued regardless of their background, it will lead to increased commitment and productivity, enhanced work relationships, and the recruitment and retention of the best employees.⁴

Needless to say, companies will have the ability to drive business growth and improve customer service by involving their diverse workforce. This means making use of language skills, cultural sensitivity, knowledge of business networks in their home countries and market knowledge. With these key assets, organizations will have competitive advantages in marketing goods and services to an increasingly migrant community as well as to the global market.⁵

Also, it can be stated that organizations can expect enhanced creativity and problem solving from a diverse workforce. Research has shown that diverse groups tend to be more creative than homogenous groups, in part because people with diverse backgrounds bring different perspectives to problem solving.

Disadvantages of cultural diversity in an organization

There are also some disadvantages of a culturally diverse workforce.

A first drawback can be considered to be communication which becomes more difficult. Sometimes, employees from different cultures fail to understand one another. Companies operating in different language areas find difficulty in communicating with the local employees because local employees speak different language.

Another disadvantage refers to the fact that cultural diversity increases the complexity and problems in developing overall organizational procedures. Moreover, cultural diversity creates difficulties for an organization when it wants to reach on a single agreement. Diversity also causes problems when managers and employees over generalize organizational policies, strategies, practices and procedures. A further disadvantage is that diversity increases ambiguity, complexity and confusion.

Nowadays, failure to handle diversity can create a lot of problems for a company.

An important problem is financial cost that may be caused by high

turnover, absenteeism and/or lawsuits. Companies lose the money invested in recruiting and training when a dissatisfied employee leaves. High turnover means employees are constantly in a learning stage without performing at their full potential. Moreover, absenteeism results in a significant cost: there is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of being valued and cared about and their attendance. In addition to this, lawsuits on racial discrimination can also cause financial cost to the company.⁶

Reduced individual and organizational productivity are also serious problems. This occurs when people experience prejudice and non acceptance. People who feel unappreciated are less innovative, and are less aggressive in pressing their ideas or in assuming leadership. They will not voice disagreement, because they want to be accepted, and time will be wasted due to poor communication and misunderstandings⁷.

It can be stated that, a less obvious impact is the tarnished corporate image that develops around employee dissatisfaction. If a corporation becomes known as one that alienates non-traditional employees, it will have a hard time finding qualified workers in periods of limited skilled labour supply.⁸

Managing cultural diversity within Caresteam Health

This chapter focuses on a survey performed on 35 employees of Carestream Health having different roles (management, IT, customer services, coordinators) and different nationalities (Romanian, French, British, American, etc).

Carestream Health is a world class, global corporation with over 100 years of leadership in healthcare innovation. The company serves a diversified customer base in over 170 countries, it is part of the Onex (one of Canada's largest and most respected companies) family of companies since 2007, being formerly a division of Eastman Kodak. The company has thousands of healthcare solutions, such as RIS and PACS, enterprise workflow, cloud-based services. Carestream is one of the top global providers of digital radiography (DR) and computed radiography (CR) systems. I chose this company as a subject to my case study as I have been working for the company for 6 years and, during the years, I had the opportunity to observe the impact that the culturally diverse workplace has on the employees and how the company's management adjusted to the more and more complex and diverse workforce.

This study explores the perception that these respondents have on the organizational culture of the company, the advantages and disadvantages of working in a culturally diverse workplace and the impact that it has on the

individual. It is about identifying factors based on leadership behavior and proposes a model for effective management and leadership.

In order to obtain equity of responses to my survey, I targeted 35 participants, all Carestream employees: 18 women and 17 men almost half of them aged between 18-35 years, 40% aged 36-50 years and 9% aged 50+.

Gender (35 responses)

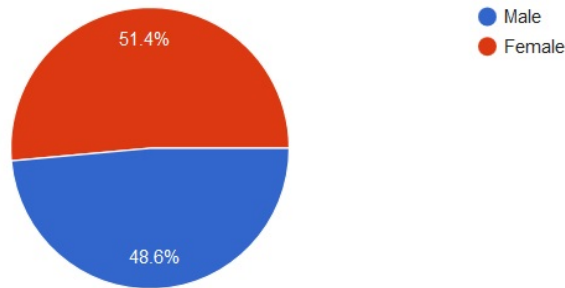


Fig.1: Survey - Gender

Age (35 responses)

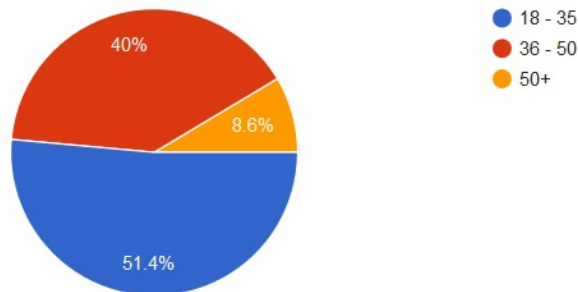


Fig. 2: Survey – Age

The nationalities of the participants vary: Romanian (12), French (9), Italian (3), German (1), Spanish (1), Moldavian (1), American (1), Mexican (1), Swedish (2), British (1), Belgian (1), Indian (1), Tatar (1) as do the roles they have within the company: managers, team leaders, coordinators, subject matter experts, technician, planners, implementation specialist, financial controllers, etc. (different departments were targeted: IT, finance, customer order services, management, supply and demand, technical support).

More than half of the Carestream employees that answered the survey have been working for the company for more than 5 years.

I chose them as they have a wide experience in the company and during these years they had the time to observe and analyze the cultural diversity and the relation that the company built with it. I also wanted to question some of the new

comers, to see if there are differences between their points of view:

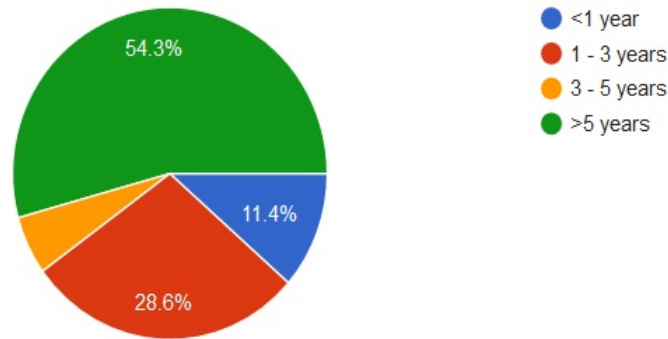


Fig.3: Survey – How many years the participants have worked for the company 34 answers from the total 35 had a positive answer to the question: “Do you think that you are working in a multicultural environment?” making a clear statement that Carestream faces a multicultural diversity.

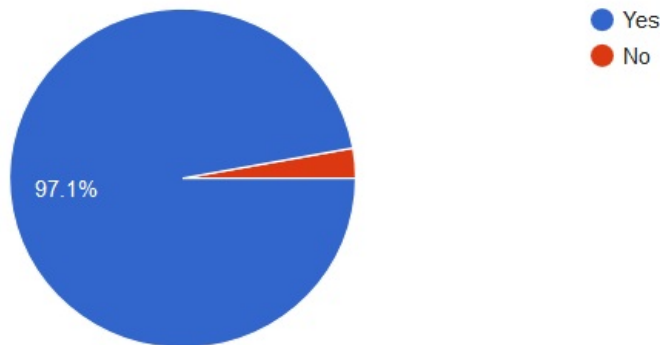


Fig. 4: Survey - Do you think that you are working in a multicultural environment?

Hofstede affirms that there is no standard definition for the organizational culture concept, but even so, it can be defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from others”. Each company has its own unique organizational culture and based on the six organizational culture dimensions proposed by Hoffstede and the answers provided by the 35 participants in the survey, we can sketch the Carestream organizational culture: it is a results orientated culture, where achieving specific internal results is the goal, even if they involve taking some risks (24 answers). According to 31 participants, the company has a job orientated culture, completing the job being more important than concern for the people. Carestream is an open system, where new comers feel welcome and anyone can fit within the organization (26 answers). Questioned about the level of control,

22 participants answered that the company relies on a tight control rule, where people are cost-conscious, punctual and serious. 20 participants agree that Carestream is a normative company, where business ethics and honesty matter most, rather than only emphasizing the need to meet customers' expectations.

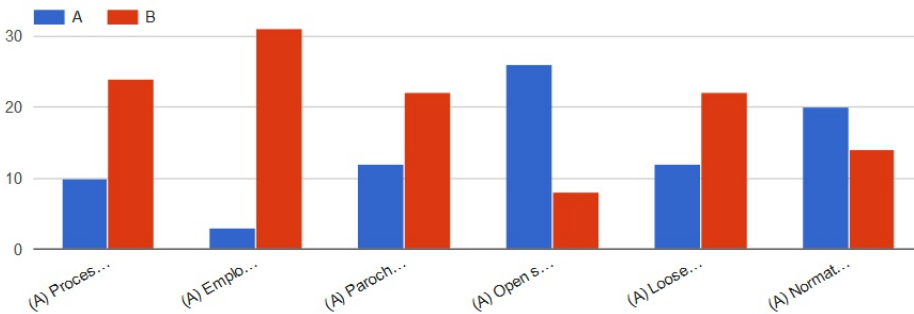


Fig. 5: Survey – Organizational culture

Analyzing the data received from the answers provided to the survey, it can be said that the highly agreed perception that the employees have regarding the organizational culture within Carestream is ambition, 50% of the participants seeking opportunities for advancement and wanting to contribute to the success of the organization. 30% of the respondents feel that workaholicism best describes their experience in the company, work being more important than leisure time. A smaller percentage, 10% of participants agree that alienation is also part of the organizational culture, the company not being professional, the management being faulty and with a hostile attitude against the organization. The rest of 10% of the answers are split between authoritarianism, management authority being considered never questioned and machismo, some of the respondents considering that work and career are more important than family.

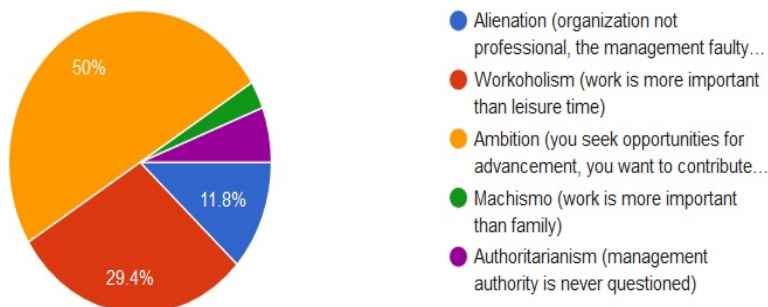


Fig. 6: Survey – Perception regarding the organizational culture.

Leadership affects all facets of human enterprise. Though there are many definitions of leadership, each definition has a different focus on leadership.

Leadership according to Hemphill and Coons is “a behavior of an individual directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal”.⁹ Fiedler advances a similar definition as follows: “By leadership behavior we generally mean the particular acts in which a leader engages in the course of directing and coordinating the work of his group members. This may involve such as structuring the work relations, praising or criticizing, group members and showing consideration for their welfare and feelings.”¹⁰ Overall, we might say that leadership is the process of effectively and sensibly directing the activities of an individual or a group towards achieving certain goals and any given situation concerning the work environment.

11 of the 35 participants to the survey are leaders, managing teams from 4 to 100 people. Asked to describe what the impact that a multicultural environment has it on the team and in the company is, the opinions vary: leading a multicultural team can be fun and rewarding, but the mind needs to be flexible and agile. They need to adapt to different way of thinking as there are different perspectives coming from different people, leading to a unique solution. The team doesn't always connect to the values promoted by the leaders of the company, but that doesn't mean that they don't do their job right. New approaches and new points of view are offered by a multicultural environment at the cost of more conscious and more structured communication.

Communication is crucial and developing sensitivity, awareness and knowledge of cross-cultural communication types can come to be of great value when managing a multicultural organization. What is also very important for leaders is to learn how to effectively get their message across without becoming patronizing in the way they communicate.

There are a few competencies that a leader should have, along with attitudes and solid values. A first value should be promoting mutual respect through the development of awareness of the diversity of the people. This is achieved through an honest recognition of where the employees are coming from as individuals and where the leader wants to direct them to as a new community in order to merge within his organization.

Asked what the qualities that a leader should have when managing a culturally diverse team are, the participants to the survey concluded that the most important quality was communication, followed by conscious responsibility, self-awareness and empathy.

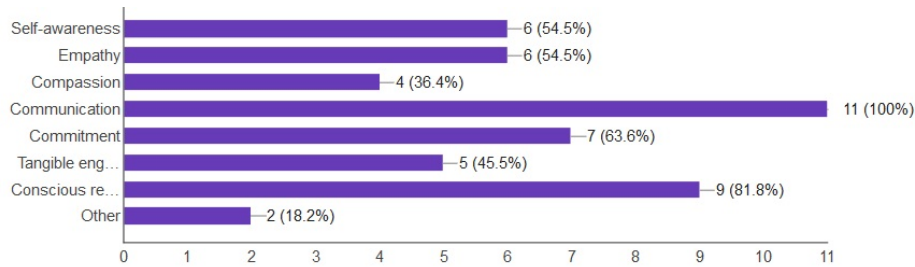


Fig. 7: Survey – The qualities a leader should have when managing a culturally diverse team

In my research, I have come across different leadership theories that have been developed in time. In the Karpin Report, developed in 1995 by the Enterprising Nation it is stated that the challenge of managing diversity is to develop a new way of thinking about the social world, a new way of treating “difference”, a frame of mind which sees the potential, the excitement of working with people who are different. In “International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior” Nancy Adler proposes 3 strategies for managing cultural differences: ignore, minimize or reduce the cultural diversity within a company.

Asking the 11 leaders participating in the survey to choose the appropriate one for Carestream, 10 of them, meaning 91%, inclined to define “Manage cultural differences (recognize the impact of cultural diversity that leads to both advantages and disadvantages; managers and employees minimize potential problems by managing the impact of cultural diversity, not by attempting to minimize diversity itself)” as being the one followed by Carestream Health and only one considered that minimize cultural differences is the strategy followed by the company.

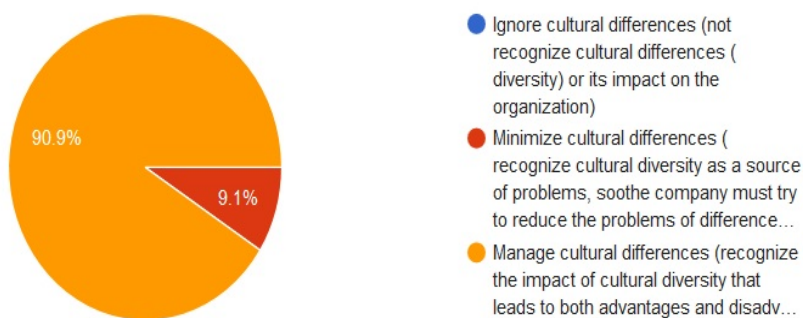


Fig. 8: Survey – Strategies for managing cultural differences

Diversity enhances creativity and innovation and has its advantages.

The persons that participated in my survey consider that working in a multicultural space gave them the opportunity to interact with different cultures

and understand their way of thinking, to embrace creative and unusual ways of solving problems; they had to adapt their way of action and communication in order to get the results needed. Some of them consider that diversity itself is an advantage, helping them to become more tolerant, to connect with people and develop both on a personal and professional plan.

Diversity has also some flaws and disadvantages: the act of communication becomes more difficult (communication has to be written more than verbal). Employees from different cultures might fail in understanding one another on a basic level, because of their difference in cultural backgrounds (the level of rigor to request the implementation of an action may vary in different cultures, meaning that you need to be aware that the human factor in multicultural working space is an important parameter to be taken into account and anticipate the effects for accomplishing a given task). Firms operating in different language areas find difficulty in communicating with the local employees as local employees speak different language (English is a must).

Diversity can definitely raise ambiguity within the workplace, complexity and confusion and also causes problems when managers and employees make their organizational policies, strategies, practices and procedures too general. (Fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions, the multicultural environment brings diversity, productivity, but also more effort to keep the balance and consistency.)

Cultural diversity can create issues for an organization when it wants to reach a single decision. Cultural diversity may also increase the complexity and, in a logical manner, it may create problems in developing overall organizational procedures.

The fact that the team members are culturally diverse helps to provide an unexpected point of enjoyment in their working relationships, with members connecting with each other over the sharing of new cultural information (personal enrichment, “tons of people from different culture in my LinkedIn”, “outside the box thinking”, respect for other cultures and behavior). One way that this can be interpreted is simply because people, more often than not, enjoy meeting, interacting and knowing others on a deeper level and evolved in such a way that many differences seem interesting to them. I contend that the people that participated in this particular study were happier to communicate and learn than to judge. (70% of the people who answered the survey are very satisfied working in a multicultural space, 24% are somewhat satisfied and only 6% are neutral, no unsatisfied answer).

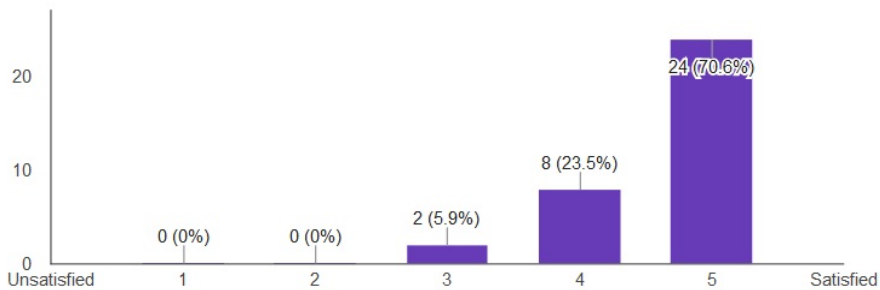


Fig. 9: Survey – Level of satisfaction working in a multicultural environment

Effective management of workforce diversity is more than just simply acknowledging differences in the employees of a certain organization. It rather involves recognizing the value and importance of those differences, fighting against discrimination, and promoting a harmonious organizational culture. (“We are open to hire any nationality. Leading a team located in a lower labor cost country dealing with other employees or even customers located in higher cost country is challenging, when on the phone with them, either colleagues or customers, sometimes because they don’t like the fact that jobs were moved from their countries to lower cost countries we still see discrimination, bad behaviors, disrespectful comments towards our service representatives. So I think we are still not there yet, we still have to work towards the same goals, and focus on what we need to accomplish.”)

As Klopfer states, benefits of diversity are never automatic. Benefits are obtained through well trained, hardworking, and committed leaders with excellent diversity skills and capability of facing the challenge, by finding new ways to make diversity work and realize the potential for benefit.¹¹

Conclusions

When writing this paper, I learned much on the subject of cultural diversity, organization culture, dimensions of culture, diversity management or how to manage cultural diversity in business environments.

I learned that diversity always entails challenges but also opportunities that would not be present in homogeneous groups, since an entire uniformity is not realistic and feasible; organizations have to deal with it and try to benefit most from differences. When people of various cultures come together on common ground, they can bring their assets, their unique knowledge and problem solving skills for a focused issue and spark creativity in the process of team work within a company.

Diversity in leadership within a company allows managers to bring in new

skills and methods for achieving unity within their teams. As ideas that are more diverse are brought to the table, the chances of finding a workable answer are improved. In situations where brainstorming is necessary, more ideas are formed because team members come from different cultural backgrounds, they have different experiences, creating a vast team knowledge base.

I think that an organization success depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and seek for the benefits, but cultural diversity can affect the workplace in numerous ways. Negative effects can include miscommunication, creation of barriers, or dysfunctional adaptation barriers. Culturally diverse workers have different opinions, thoughts, beliefs, customs, values, trends and traditions. We can add conflicts, lost productivity, difficulty to achieve harmony in mixed teams. There are also language barriers that need to be overcome for diversity teams to succeed. Ineffective communication results in confusion and lack of teamwork. There are always employees who refuse to accept the change, the diversity.

But encouraging workforce collaboration through mutual respect for colleagues, without regard to work style, ethnicity or culture is a way to foster appreciation for diversity. I believe that culturally diverse teams can bring more creative, synergistic and effective outcomes even if there are negative sides. A collaborative workforce can result in a more productive workplace, which in turn, translates to greater organizational success.

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