

ABSTRACT

Diversity encompasses complex differences and similarities in perspectives, identities, and points of view among members of an institution as well as among individuals who make up the wider community. Diversity includes important and interrelated dimensions of human identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, socio-economic status, nationality, citizenship, religion, sexual orientation, ability and age. These differences are important to understand but they cannot be used to predict any individual's values, choices or responses.

Organizations with diverse employees are better suited to serve diverse external customers in an increasingly global market. Such organizations have a better understanding of the requirements of the legal, political, social, economic, and cultural environments. Organizations that manage diversity are recipients of more commitment, and better satisfied as well as better performing employees (Patrick & Kumar, 2012).

Ensuring better social relations among team members has become complex. The nature of teams is not how they used to be, organizations have spread across geographically which has led to the birth of virtual teams. Virtual team members are been separated by time and space this makes it even more difficult to ensure that social capital is being maintained among virtual team members, as only when there is a trust, reciprocity and cooperation among virtual team members they will be better connected individuals who obtain greater advantages, this ensures that groups and organizations improve performance and obtain sustainable competitive advantage (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

The present investigation was focused on understanding the perception of members of virtual teams towards diversity at workplace. This study assists us to find out how virtual team members can overcome Individual and Organizational Challenges towards diversity and to find out the social relations among virtual team members, how much trust exists among them, how much virtual team members have clear understanding and perception of organizational goals and values; and how much they accept and are committed to them. The variables under investigation were Diversity Perception, Individual and Organizational challenges towards diversity and Social Capital.

Among the five dimensions of Diversity Perception the Behavioral Reactions was perceived highest by virtual team members followed by Emotional Reactions, Organizational Outcomes, Judgments and Personal Consequences. Virtual team members fairly perceived that Individual Challenges towards diversity can be overcome followed by Organizational Challenges towards diversity. Among the three dimensions of social capital Relational Dimensions were moderately perceived by virtual team members followed by Structural Dimension and Cognitive Dimensions. It was found that there is a significant relationship between Diversity Perceptions and Challenges towards Diversity. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between Diversity Perception and Social Capital. It was found that there is a significant relationship between Challenges towards Diversity and Social Capital. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between Social Capital and Interactions between Diversity Perceptions and Challenges towards Diversity. It was found that there was a significant difference in Diversity Perception across marital status, gender, qualification and age. It was also found that there was a significant difference in Challenges

towards diversity across qualification and age. It was also found that there was a significant difference in Social Capital across marital status, gender and age. It was found that among the dimensions of Diversity Perceptions, Behavioral Reactions had a negative influence on Social Capital.

In order to enhance virtual team members Diversity Perception organizations should initiate Awareness-based diversity training; this training is designed to increase employee knowledge and sensitivity to diversity issues (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). In order to ensure better trust, social ties among virtual team members, organizations should inspire individuals to share their work with each other, reassure effective communication among the team members and assign them targets and ask their team members to contribute equally and achieve the target within the desired time frame this will assist virtual team members to overcome Challenges towards Diversity.

To make virtual team members overcome challenges towards diversity organizations should define what diversity is for them, they should be realistic when setting goals, involve everyone who has a responsibility for diversity, from the CEO to every virtual team member, and they should also manage virtual team members' expectations. Diversity Challenges at the organizational level is complex and not every company will advance at the same pace. This will enable virtual team members to overcome Organizational level challenges towards Diversity, which will strengthen their Social Capital. Organizations should be empathetic among virtual team members, should acknowledge their needs and point of view as this remove the major barrier to communication (Pon, Pont, & Miller, 1999). This will indorse that virtual team members behave positively

whenever they encounter Diversity. When challenges towards diversity are handled in a healthy way they make people to grow, improve their productivity and relationships, decrease workplace tension and results in a positive workplace (Holt, 2009). Studies show that when people understand diversity better they lead to better ties among the communities. When society have better understanding of diversity this allows them to see their differences and similarities and be better able to relate to one another (Ortiz, 2010). Virtual team members who have a greater understanding of Diversity have stronger social relations among colleagues as they recognize, understand and accept diversity of each other at workplace. Diverse workplace poses lesser problem if employees have regular, personal interactions with each other. That is, if employees have social ties with their colleagues, the diversity among them may not be as threatening to their level of interpersonal trust as for someone who works in a diverse workplace without such (Stolle, Soroka, & Johnston, 2008). Successful Diversity Management is essential for improved Social Capital.

Keywords: Diversity Perception, Challenges towards Diversity, Social Capital, Virtual Team