Cultural diversity training programme development for hospitality and tourism industry enterprises

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Abstract
Workforce diversity is an important challenge and consideration for a business that needs to be carefully managed and embraced as one offering opportunity. It is critical that businesses promote cultural diversity in the workplace. Consequently, diversity training programmes are necessary to build conducive work relationships amongst people who are employed in an industry that deals on a daily basis with global customers. Developing multicultural diversity training programmes is non-negotiable and should be an ongoing process.

Purpose
This paper investigates employee dissimilarity, organizational climate, management of cultural diversity in a sample of hotel industry enterprises, and suggests how cultural diversity training programmes could be more effectively developed by business. It is emphasised that strategic planning for incorporating diversity into the mission of the business is essential. Suggestions are made on how to assess needs and develop a training manual. It is also the purpose of this paper to identify questions requiring further research.

Design/methodology/approach
A conceptual analysis and review of relevant literature was undertaken and analysis was based on a review of refereed articles, discussion papers and short papers in key academic hospitality, tourism and general management journals. Numerous hospitality and tourism industry enterprises were approached on an informal basis on how cultural diversity is managed in the workplace.

Findings
Multicultural diversity training should be viewed as critical to effective business in the melting pot of South African society. The fundamental nature of the hospitality and tourism industry in South Africa is undergoing extensive change in terms of multicultural staffing and it is necessary for industry to review its efforts in respect of multicultural diversity training. Failure to do so could result in a crisis of immense proportions.

Research limitations/implications
The study was limited, in that a relatively small sample of businesses were investigated in terms of multicultural diversity management and only in one province of South Africa.

Practical implications
The methods, techniques and systemic approaches discussed in this paper could be utilized by hospitality and tourism industry managers to proactively prevent cultural diversity problems from arising between employees and their fellow employees as well as between employees and guests in the workplace.

Social implications
Given the historical racist background of South African society, the ideas proposed in this paper could be useful in promoting respect and tolerance between employees from multiculturally diverse backgrounds.

Originality/value
There are scant local sources offering guidance to South African hotel and tourism industry managers on cultural diversity management. This paper seeks to assist service industry managers to make informed decisions on cultural diversity training programme issues.

The paper is conceptual in nature.

Key words: Multicultural diversity, training programmes, service quality, workplace harmony.

“The goal is the creation of a non-discriminatory, diverse, and inclusive workplace – a world in which members of both sexes are valued for what they bring to the workplace and are granted the opportunity to make full use of their talents .... What a wonderful world this would be” (Powell and Graves, 2003).

Introduction
One of the most pressing challenges and primary concerns facing hospitality and tourism industry enterprises in South Africa is the creation of a fully inclusive and supportive diversity culture in the workplace. How this managed is of paramount importance to the success of an organisation. Diversity Management is the systematic and planned commitment by an organisation to recruit, retain, reward and promote a heterogeneous mix of employees so as to improve the effectiveness of the organisation. Those organisations that tend to develop a reputation and experience in managing diversity are more likely to attract superior personnel (Carrell & Mann, 1995). It has become critical for enterprises to recognise and effectively manage workforce diversity which is a relatively complex phenomenon. By promoting cultural diversity initiatives, a business will essentially be creating for itself a competitive advantage as diversified competencies are developed. Managing cultural diversity is a means of responding to the need to recognise, respect and fully benefit from having an employee complement emanating from diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, race, gender and social background. South Africa is a ‘melting pot’ of many cultures and the management of the diversity of employees is a tool which will serve to increase the effectiveness of any business and which will ultimately promote success in the global labour market (Verma and Elman, 2007). It is a challenge to manage cultural diversity in a society that was torn apart by the racial segregation of apartheid in the recent past, but it is one that can be surmounted and utilized to improve the performance of a business. The many differences between employees can serve to strengthen the bonds that are created between them and with customers from all around the globe. It is vital for an employee to compromise with others with whom one does not necessarily agree failing which discord would result in the workplace (Berlin, 2001).

Personal interaction between employees and between them and customers, especially in service operations, is receiving far greater attention than was previously the case (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). There are marked differences between people in terms of culture, language preference and styles of communication and it is thus critical to know something about these aspects. Having a culturally diverse workforce enables a business to serve a far broader base of customers with ease as the employees are able to relate to customers who are just as diverse as they are. Businesses which have relevant cultural diversity policy guidelines in place find that the management of cultural diversity is not as complex as it may appear. First and foremost, the development of cultural diversity training programmes needs to be intensified if hospitality and tourism businesses are to create harmonious and efficient work relationships amongst employees. Failure to be pro-active in this regard can be catastrophic.

It is the purpose of this article to increase sensitivity in hospitality and tourism businesses in Gauteng province and beyond, to the dire need to develop effective cultural diversity training programmes. Only by empowering employees from all cultural and other backgrounds, can a business hope to be successful. Diversity is not merely a management issue. All employees must be able to deal within
culturally diverse environments. By facilitating appropriate training workshops in which cultural diversity training is core, employees’ attitudes, values and the ways in which they relate to one another is greatly enhanced. Training in this regard also enhances the understanding of employees in relation to one-another and in the development of internalized controls such as norms and values amongst employees who are trained (Scott and Meyer, 1991).

**Employee Dissimilarity**

This refers to the extent to which an employee differs from others in the workplace in terms of visual dissimilarity and informational dissimilarity (Hobman, Bordia, & Gallois, 2003). Visual dissimilarity is essentially based on characteristics of another person which one sees such as age, gender, and ethnic background. Informational dissimilarity is anchored on differences in the knowledge, skills, backgrounds, and experiences between employees and their fellow workers. According to Milliken and Martins (1996), visual dissimilarity is the type of dissimilarity which is most likely to be either positive or negative and evokes strong sentiments from co-workers and is based predominantly on preconceived notions, stereotypes and biases. In the South African context, visual dissimilarity is a very important factor in destructive workplace behavior, due mainly to the Apartheid policies which pervaded the county for decades, and is a critical aspect to consider in seeking to promote cultural diversity in a nation which has had a turbulent history. However the main problems in the workplace emanate from informational dissimilarity and this has the tendency to lead to problems that are task-related (Hobman, Bordia, & Gallois, 2003). If employees are at different levels of skill, knowledge, background and experience it becomes difficult to arrive at consensus solutions to day-to-day operational problems and tensions are likely to arise in the workplace.

There are three theories which are related to this study and the road ahead for cultural diversity in the workplace, these are the attraction-selection-attrition, social identity, and self-categorization theories. The attraction-selection-attrition theory states that employees are naturally attracted to people that they perceive to be similar to themselves. In this scenario, it is easy for those who are dissimilar to the majority in the group to be perceived as outsiders (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). The self-categorization and social identity theories suggest that a major part of an employee’s self-concept is obtained from his/her membership of a group and the value and emotional importance attached to that membership is significant. The fundamental aspects which draw individual employees to a particular group are race, ethnicity, and gender. One of the main reasons for this is that individuals seek to preserve more than a modicum of self-esteem and a positive self-identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The social identification theory adherents tend to develop in stereotypical perceptions of themselves and other employees and such perceptions invariably lead to ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination (Brickson, 2000). Consequently, employees who are seen as outsiders may be
considered to be less socially attractive and may even be considered to be dishonest and untrustworthy, bordering on xenophobia (Hobman, Bordia, & Gallois, 2003).

Where there is visual and informational dissimilarity, this may result in employees demonstrating very diverse perspectives in the business and in the way functions are carried out. Where there are dissimilarities these may lead to enhanced levels of creativity which are usually found in culturally diverse organizations (Jackson, 1992). Organizations can benefit greatly from creative decisions and innovative problem solving techniques by recruiting and selecting employees that are from different backgrounds. Dissimilar employees tend to create heterogeneous groups that can have an advantage over homogeneous groups when it comes to carrying out of creative tasks. McLeod, et al. (1996), states that: "diverse groups will have a performance advantage over homogeneous groups on creativity tasks requiring knowledge of different cultures". Employees emanating from comparable educational backgrounds and have had similar life experiences are more easily able to identify and communicate with one another other. In similar vein, employees who are on similar levels within the hierarchy of the organization may have similar knowledge and experiences of the policies of the organization. As a result of this, those high in information dissimilarity may find that they are regarded as part of the out-group.

The empirical evidence suggests that diverse workgroups tend to experience higher turnover (Jackson et al., 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1989; Wagner et al., 1984). According to Jackson (1992), the demographic composition of senior management employees allows Human resources to predict turnover rates with culturally diverse teams experiencing a higher turnover. Research suggests that employees tend to leave an organization because of the individual's dissimilarity and the group's heterogeneity. Women appear to be more likely to leave a job than men. In the United States of America, the turnover rates for women from different cultural backgrounds other than whites, are 58 percent higher than those for men (Meisenheimer, 1990).

Where there is a large employee dissimilarity-turnover relationship it can be attributed to poor person-organization fit (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Chatman, 1991). Research suggests that the closer the fit between the expectations of employees and the organization, the more likely it will be for an individual employee to remain in the the organization (Schneider, 1987). Employees that possess dissimilar attributes are far more likely to leave an organization than those who have similar characteristics (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991). One may thus deduce that an organization comprised of people who are very similar to each other will often eject employees who are different which tends to result in a homogeneous organization within which there is little or no diversity.

**Organisational Climate**

Organizational climate is a concept that enables us to identify how an organization is a meaningful work environment for individual employees (Payne and Pugh, 1976). It represents the employees’
perceptions of the conditions, factors, and events that take place in the organization (Ekvall, 1987). Organizations communicate their outlook of employee behaviours through the organizational climate that exists in the workplace. Some organizational climates are better at accepting diversity than others. How the employees view the organization is critical. The climate in the organization may be viewed as that which is characterised by the employees' perceptions of the objective characteristics of the organization (Landy, 1989).

The number of managers employed by hotels and travel agencies is objective, but the employees' feelings about those managers is generally subjective. There is much evidence in current literature to suggest that organizational climate can and does influence both job performance and employee satisfaction in the workplace (Riordan et al, 2001). Organizational climate reflects elements found within the organizational environment, and includes policies and processes. Employee behaviour is usually a result of their perceptions of the work environment more so than of the reality of the work environment in which they operate (James & James, 1989). In the hotels and travel agencies visited a number of reasons were cited by employees for their ‘unfair treatment’ in the workplace:

- Race and ethnic group
- Nationality
- Gender
- Age
- Accent or the way one speaks
- Disability
- ‘Physical appearance’
- Union membership
- Dress code
- Religion

Organizational climate perceptions are appropriate to consider when the focus is on individual employee upliftment. If employees in a collectivistic workplace culture note differences in their fellow employees attitudes towards them, they are more likely to adjust their own behaviour in a positive sense thereby contributing to a more harmonious workplace environment. The organizational culture sets the stage for the work environment. Organizations that tend to embrace employee diversity craft an environment in which all employees and their cultures are appreciated and utilized to achieve organizational success (Richard & Grimes, 1996). As a result, even though employees may be dissimilar, the negative outcomes of the dissimilarity will be reduced while the positive outcomes are reinforced.

Management of cultural diversity in a sample of hospitality and tourism industry enterprises in Gauteng

Le Meridien Hotel, Mauritius, 24-27 August 2010
During the course of the research for this paper, nine hotels and two travel agencies were visited in Johannesburg, Roodepoort and Sandton in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Very few hotel managers in Gauteng that were visited in the course of this research are competent cultural diversity skills facilitators and appear to have the issue at heart and realize the importance of being committed to the long-term process of employee development at an individual level. In direct contrast to the hospitality and tourism industries in the United States, multi-cultural diversity is not yet the most important topic for discussion in the hospitality and tourism industry in South Africa. In three hotels falling into the upper price range market there appears to have been an attempt on the part of middle managers to uncover the multi-culturality of the environment in the workplace. In the six middle price-range enterprises as well as the travel agencies, there were no cultural diversity training initiatives in place at all. Very basic conversations were held with employees emanating from diverse backgrounds but it became abundantly clear based on oral feedback obtained directly from these managers that any meetings with employees on cultural diversity issues were based on assumptions and stereotypes in which bias and pre-conceived notions existed on the part of both the manager and the employee. The managers jumped to conclusions about the employee which degraded the value of the meetings held. It was also apparent that no genuine attempt was made to hear or understand what the employees had to say and additional problem appears to have been the fact that most of the managers did not have an understanding or knowledge of the various cultures and languages of the employees.

Middle-managers apportioned blame to their superiors for the lack of effective interaction with employees and most stated that they did not feel very comfortable discussing diversity related issues with line-managers and other employees. Consequently individual employee training needs for the culturally diverse cohort of employees based on strengths and weaknesses could not be identified. These findings were the same at all three hotels. Most managers lacked understanding of broad diversity management including Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). Most seemed to understand what Employment Equity (EE) entailed but did not consider cultural diversity training to be a key strategic objective for the business despite the ongoing xenophobia pervading certain parts of South African society.

Organizational Socialization

Jones (1986) adapted a set of socialization tactics first proposed by Van Maanen & Schein (1979) involving six groups of socialization tactics. He grouped these into two categories namely individualized and institutionalized tactics (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Jones, 1986). These tactics are the implemented in order to help acclimatize employees from diverse cultural backgrounds into the organization’s culture.
When individualized employees are socialized, they are allowed to make decisions regarding how their tasks should be performed. There are fewer schedules, guidelines, and procedures in an organization that implements individualization strategies. Such an organization is also more heterogeneous because creativity and innovation is encouraged. By encouraging all employees irrespective of culture etc, to develop innovative roles and by showing genuine appreciation for a diverse range of beliefs and values, organizations will be forging a workplace where dissimilar employees feel valued and see themselves as part of the inner-group. If tactics are put into operation that encourage and promote diversity in the workplace, hospitality and tourism organizations will benefit from the positive consequences thereof.

**Advantages of cultural diversity training in the workplace**

Managing diversity in workplace has the effect of eliminating stereotypes and aids managers to be more consistent and fair in the development and empowerment of employees. It also assists in managing and appraising their performance and in dealing with grievances and disciplinary matters more effectively. The relationships between employees improve and they tend to become more collaborative and team-oriented after having embarked on some type of cultural diversity training. Generally, these employees tend to feel more motivated and develop greater trust of their fellow employees and managers in particular. Most employees feel more comfortable with themselves in a diverse workplace and happily share information and communicate openly about a wider range of issues related to the workplace.

According to a study conducted by Watson et al (1993), culturally diverse groups are more effective in job performance as well as the process of interaction. There is also research which indicates that the more diversity in the workplace the greater the level dissatisfaction and employee turnover. (Miliken and Martins, 1996). It is also clear that diversity in hospitality and tourism operations is important for the improvement of representation in the workplace especially in light of the demographic changes in employees and in terms of employment equity, affirmative action and equal opportunity. Wentling and Palma-Rivas (2000), stress that organisations that have culturally diverse workforces are capable of providing greater service quality excellence because they understand the needs of customers better. Diversity is also reported to enhance a spirit of entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and gives an organisation a strategic competitive advantage. (Coleman 2002). Human Rights issues are also addressed when a diverse workforce is managed in the workplace.

**Disadvantages of cultural diversity in the workplace**
Unfortunately, cultural diversity in the workplace may increase the likelihood of conflict in the workplace when individual or groups of employees do not agree in a particular situation. Such conflict can lead stereotyping and culture clashes. (White, 1999). A second disadvantage is that if a culturally diverse workforce exists additional training will be required which has an added cost implication to the organisation. However, in the medium to long-term the cost of the training is well worth the result that is produced.

A third possible disadvantage is that there is a high turnover rate in workplaces where employees are dissimilar and feel they need to leave a company. In the hospitality industry however there is in any event and employee turnover to every six to twelve months in the average operation. It has been reported that where employees feel they are not part of an “inner group” they are more likely to be frequently absent from work. Despite these real or perceived disadvantages, no business in the globalised world of the 21st century is likely to survive without cultural diversity in its employee base.

Developing cultural diversity training programmes

There are thousands of employees from other cultures employed in the South African hospitality and tourism industry. Many have left behind family and possessions, and countries ravaged by corrupt leadership or political instability and have come to the country seeking a new life in what is essentially radically different country. Cultural diversity can be managed through creating a greater sense of awareness amongst all employees about the different values of fellow employees and through facilitating a greater acknowledgement, greater support and motivation of employees. It is also important to link diversity to all business strategies and processes especially those involving employee development, performance management and reward systems (Cascio, 1995). Some hotels have a diversity policy in place with very basic diversity training. Travel agencies investigated had none. This façade seems to suggest that some hospitality operations are not truly embracing diversity in a meaningful way and are as a direct consequence not being as effective as they could be in providing service quality excellence to customers.

In the recommendations which follows an assumption is made that cultural diversity training programmes are equally valid in any hospitality industry related business irrespective of size or environment. It is vital that the person driving the cultural diversity training obtains the support of top management and develops training based on real business needs. In this regards open communication must be encouraged.

The situation with regard to cultural diversity in the organisation must be formally assessed and all cultural stereotypes and assumptions must be challenged. The training period should promote the idea of mentoring and encourage this beyond the two day training period. It should also be a time to establish employee networks.
Deming who is widely recognised as the main guru of quality management, specifically for his 14 Points for Quality Management, stresses that barriers must be broken down between employees and departments. He also says that fear must be driven out of the workplace and that every individual employee must be dedicated to transformation in the workplace (Cottman, 1993). These points of quality management speak to the heart of cultural diversity training. The global service industry understands the significance of continuously striving to improve quality of service as a way of arriving at long-term business goals. In this regard employee empowerment is critical as it allows a business to gain a competitive advantage. Lin (2002), states that it is necessary to understand empowerment before it can be implemented effectively. Only in an environment where employees from culturally diverse background are empowered can they assume their responsibilities effectively. By having cultural diversity training programmes in the work place, a business is able initiate employee empowerment and this in turn leads to a healthy work environment.

The objectives of a multi-cultural diversity programme should be far greater than only language development and should be understood in their political, cultural and socio-economic contexts. The following guidelines are suggested to managers/facilitators before embarking on multi-cultural training:

1. Objectives must be defined, such as defining problems in the work process and analysing very specific intellectual or physical skills.
2. An estimate must be made as to time spent in training and in preparing relevant documents.
3. Employees who will be involved in the training will need to be identified.
4. Stress to employees that the training is on going and that needs assessment of individual employees will be done on a regular basis.
5. The training needs of the employees must be assessed, including language proficiency.
6. The socio-political context from which employees emanate must be considered.
7. The perspectives and goals of both the business and employee must be considered.
8. Training initiatives should be multidisciplinary and address, people, culture, company policy, operating systems, and practices.
9. The individual must be considered in context and not be defined by his or her demographics.
10. Underpinning diversity management must be leadership, empowerment, and continuous learning.
11. There must be a clear definition of what cultural diversity is, for example culture is learned and shared values and behaviours which are common to a particular group of people etc.
12. Employees must understand how their work fits into the totality of work in the business.
13. Training must be conducted in such a way so as to be seen as being developmental and must engage employees in working out solutions to workplace problems in teams. Cultural diversity training workshops can also serve the purpose of enhancing the succession and promotion planning process. Managers at senior level should be held accountable for any xenophobia in the workplace if no cultural diversity training initiatives have been taken.

**How to deliver the training**

Initially, employees who will be involved including managers and lower level employees, could be provided with self-study manuals and with other preparatory information which could be computer-based. This information should explain the purpose and possible outcomes of the training and should stress that employees are free to express their feelings without fear of being ‘victimised’. The facilitator should explain that it is a process of personal development and that employees will learn much from the workshops especially in regard to changes in values. Employees must given the opportunity to discover the multidimensionality of the workplace and must be made aware of the importance of differentiating according to individual situations. All stereotypes should be broken down and the members of the non-dominant groups in the workshops should be seen as individuals in the course of conversations with each their fellow employees. Employees who lack self-confidence or have a negative expectancy of self should be encouraged to participate as best they can. The participants must talk about issues involving culture and arrive at solutions to problems posed in case studies according to context. What is critical is an ambience in which respectful negotiation can occur or mind shifts are unlikely to take place. Without cultural diversity, awareness it is unlikely that the climate of the business will be conducive to effective and efficient operation and internal development and progression for individuals will be stifled. Diversity skills are essential and underpin all communication, especially conflict management which is common in the hospitality industry. It is the duty of managers to put into effect departmental or job specific action plans which can be monitored regularly (Seo & Creed, 2002). The training could also address these issues and assist in the promotion of a retention strategy.

Once the individuals have read through the material, group work should be undertaken (8-10 employees) in a workshop in a small classroom where individuals and discuss issues with a facilitator. It is the facilitators’ responsibility to motivate and encourage the employees by initially stating the objectives and describing the scope of the training. It is vital that the facilitator speak on the level of the audience in front him or her. Group contribution to questions debated must be promoted and both the group and individuals should be pushed mentally to answer questions and to be involved in as many activities as possible. Case studies in which problems are identified and solved by the group is one way of promoting teamwork and developing an *esprit d’corps* amongst the employees. It is
preferable that training be off site if possible. The training should create new perception and awareness of those participating and of others who may not be present.

The training should last at least two days as this gives time for bonding between people of different races, genders, social backgrounds, educational backgrounds and religions. The primary objective is to improve human resource development. On the last day of the training employees could be given a survey to complete in which they state how effective they believe the initiative has been and can also make suggestions for improvement. The opportunity to evaluate the training and make suggestions for improvement is useful so as to make future sessions more meaningful. As most of the hotels in Johannesburg and lately travel agencies have a wide range of employees from mainly homogeneous to multi-culturally diverse, it is imperative before presenting multicultural training for all managers to have undergone tactical and strategic planning in which diversity is included in the objective of the business as a means of promoting human development and making work performance more effective and efficient.

Conclusion

Managing diversity initiatives such as cultural diversity training seek to fully develop the potential of each employee and turn the different skills that each employee possesses into an advantage for the business. Through fostering the differences of employees, team creativity and entrepreneurship, innovation and problem-solving can be enhanced. The focus is then on the individual rather than the group. It is the duty of management to put into operation conditions which will serve to enhance the workforce diversity in the organisations and particularly to develop strategies to make the work environment more successful. Diversity should be the norm rather than an exception in any business.

Managing of cultural diversity in the workplace is a challenge that can and should be overcome and taken advantage of for the benefit of a company and society in general (Huo et al., 2002). It is a response to the pressing need to respect, recognize and take full advantage of the diverse backgrounds of employees in terms of race, ethnicity, creed and gender. Furthermore, it helps to improve a company’s competitive position in a highly globalized marketplace. Employees are able to identify more with the mission and vision of a company and develop a strong sense of inclusivity and ownership in their workplace. In addition to this, diversity management complies with the Employment Equity Act. Companies that have formulated strategies on cultural diversity and included cultural diversity training programmes in their operations have experienced very positive outcomes.

Diversity is part and parcel of our multicultural society and it logically follows into the workforce that are employers are faced with. In order for effective and efficient workplace relations to prevail it is vital that there be a synergy between employees who emanate from diverse backgrounds. Failure to consider this can have catastrophic consequences and impede a business desire to grow in the
marketplace. Only by promoting a supportive diversity culture can disrespect, intolerance, discrimination, and pre-conceived notions be eradicated in the workplace (Richard, 2000). It would be unethical for a business not to compromise with employees which it does not understand or have empathy with, and compromising and toleration are the correct things to do in any decent society (Berlin, 2001).

This research provides ideas for solutions to the problem of intolerance in the workplace and ultimately to xenophobia. If managers take time to promote cultural diversity initiatives and make efforts to socialize employees, there is no doubt that the productivity levels of all employees will soar thereby increasing the bottom-line.

References


