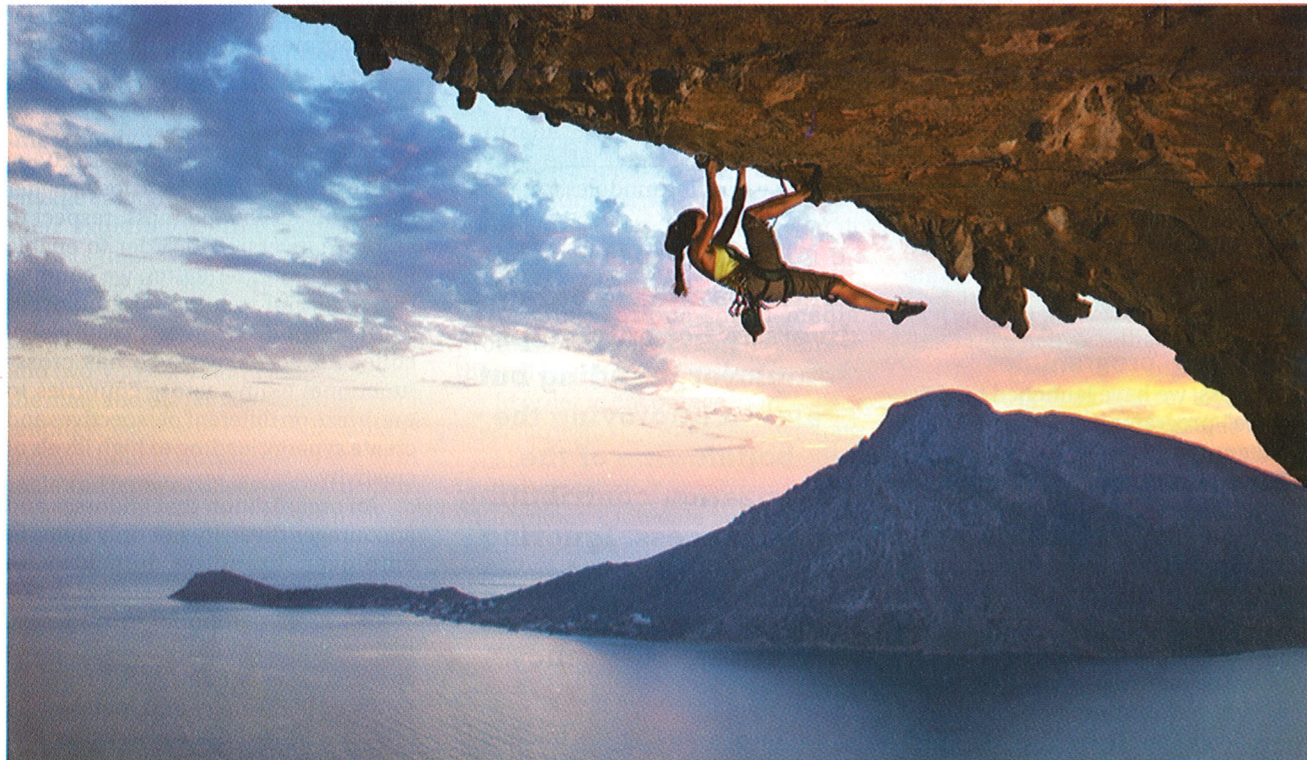


# Managing To Create Success Enablers

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- BY RAJNEESH CHOWDHURY



Organizations today are constantly in flux when it comes to the diversity of people entering the workplace, their aspirations and requirements, and the management responses expected to cater to their needs. With a multi-generation workforce, people from different academic backgrounds, and divergent expectations of the employees, a lot of which pillared on different viewpoints and belief systems, it is not an option

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## The evolution of diversity

A decade and a half ago, the Society For Human Resource Management (SHRM), after a comprehensive study of the FORTUNE 1000 companies, and companies listed on the FORTUNE's Top 100 Companies to Work For, reported that diversity initiatives positively impact a company's bottom

line, and, help in maintaining a competitive advantage. After the publication of this report, various studies across the world have well established the values that diversity and inclusion bring to business. Sufficient research on how diversity - gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, education, experience, physical ability and more - can lead to enhanced creativity and organizational performance.

Diversity in people brings in

diversity in thought; this is the basis of creativity, ideas and a force for greater impact. To quote a recent study from Deloitte, "each human being has a unique blend of identities, cultures, and experiences that inform how he or she thinks, interprets, negotiates, and accomplishes a task. Diversity of thought goes beyond the affirmation of equality - simply recognizing differences and responding to them. Instead, the focus is on realizing the full potential of people, and in turn the organization, by acknowledging and appreciating the potential promise of each person's unique perspective."

## The organizational realities

The realities confronting an organization today with respect to diversity are markedly more pronounced than ever before. Millennials at the work place come with a remarkably new set of expectations with respect to their role and the work environment. At the same time, the older employees may still be more comfortable with a better structure and predictability.

More number of people come from different educational backgrounds that shape their belief systems; 2016 has seen pronounced differences in perspectives and principles from the students and the alumni from some of the premier educational institutions in India, with a desire to camp themselves as leftists or rightists - with both sides bringing in their own valid opinions. With the number of single parents on the increase, and more so, in the urban areas, work flexibility is being deemed pertinent, among both the genders, but the connotation of flexibility may have different interpretations between the genders.

With India legally recognizing the third gender in 2014, greater intricacies could be introduced to gender based workplace requirements. It can be daunting for organizations to comprehend these developments, and, address them in a strategic and a defined manner. However, every challenge presents a new opportunity to them. This is the most suited time for the business as well as the HR

leaders to think proactively in crafting strategies that not only respond to the needs of a diverse workforce, but also encourage diversity at the workplace, and creates enablers to leverage the strengths that can be brought forth by diversity.

## Creating enablers for success

Creating success enablers for workforce diversity implies taking a strategic stance over the ways of managing a diverse workforce to create greater benefits for the business and its employees. The idea is to look beyond compliance and enjoy diversity. In order to achieve this, they are required to consider three levels - policy, operations and capability.

Policy- In order to create an organization that is driving to be diversity friendly, it is required that the drive is enabled at the policy level. The HR policy will need to reflect this intent by eliminating any kind of discrimination to influence any organizational decisions. Gender, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation or religion, amongst other factors, should never play a decisive role over someone's fate in the organization. In fact, policies around hiring, promotions, and team structures need to ensure introduction of a diverse set of people, beliefs and representations.

A Deloitte study recently reported SAP AG's intentions to recruit employees with autism. The report states that the company was driven by a research study that people with mild autism are able to focus on those complex tasks that require greater concentration. IDEO, a firm globally

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known for their innovative industrial design capabilities, have for many years consciously hired people from diverse backgrounds, since such teams bring assorted thought processes to the table, and subsequently, more powerful design capabilities.

In order to nurture diversity, HR teams need to work closely with business, to introduce responsive policies and allow individuals to work according to practices that can be productive enablers. When the people are different, it may call for different treatments.

In the Indian context, where there is more than one major religion, employees can be allowed to choose religious holidays depending on their individual faith. Such policies can help employees feel valued and cared for, since their individual requirements are respected.

In an environment where diversity is "nurtured", it is the responsibility of the organization to ensure that diversity is also "protected".

To this end, clear anti-harassment policies need to be put in place that ensures that the workplace is non-intimidating and every employee is treated as an individual.

**Operations-** As the proverb goes, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" - policies will come to life only if they are implemented with adequate processes and infrastructure. Therefore, HR needs to work as a business partner to lay out guidelines and standard operating procedures to enable the business to implement in spirit, what is in fact in letter.

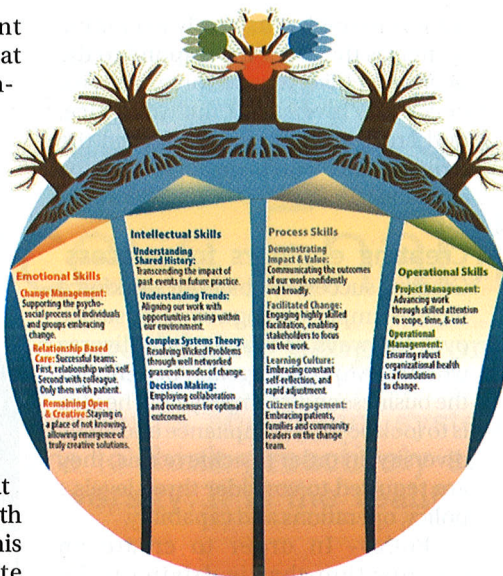
For instance, it is easier to say that the employer encourages people with special needs to apply for jobs; but this can be achieved only if adequate infrastructure is made available to those employees with special needs, so that they can access facilities and function with utmost independence.

Similarly, it is a good idea to say that the organization considers different parameters to assess one's performance during the time of appraisal. However, the performance management system has to cater to the metrics of appraisal that consider factors other than the immediate results.

For example, someone may bring in great value by thinking differently and contributing to a great idea, which has been rolled into action by another team. However, the person who brought in that idea needs to be adequately rewarded for his insightful thinking abilities.

In the case of large multinationals, businesses will have to come forward in their support for HR, while investing in analytical tools to capture employee

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percentage data for specific sections like women employees, employees with special needs, employees coming from different institutions, etc. Taking this ahead, they can ascertain as to which sections of employees are liable to perform better, stay longer or are better brand ambassadors. These analytics will help HR to understand which sections of the employees or talent prospects to focus their attention on, and ensure that they mutually benefit both the organization and the employees.

Again, to have in place an anti-harassment policy is one thing, but it also becomes HR's responsibility to ensure that the committee for anti-harassment is formed in such a manner that they remain accessible as well as unbiased.

Effective communication plays a greater role in ensuring that the employees are aware of policies, procedures, escalation matrices, safety standards, and other related information, so that they are offered an environment that is friendly and non-discriminatory. The same needs to be represented in different languages, if there are employees coming from different states speaking different languages. In case of companies that employ blue-collar workers, whose literacy level is often poor, information needs to be shared in non-textual formats like symbols and personal briefings.

**Capability-** Given that the organization has the desired policies and the right infrastructure to

operationalize them, it is the capability of HR as well as business to ensure that the initiatives are actually internalized, and made sustainable. The first step, especially for large organizations, is to set specific diversity & inclusion teams that can focus on this aspect in a dedicated manner. Organizations like Microsoft and DuPont have since long established exclusive teams led by senior officials that focus on, support and sponsor their agenda on diversity & inclusion. Such teams must be given regular training so that they are able to constantly cater to the changing requirements and the realities in the talent ecosystem.

Proactive efforts with the right intent always yield observable and impactful results. Johnson & Johnson has a global Diversity & Inclusion vision and strategy in promoting women in larger numbers in the workplace over a period. This has ensured a place for the company among the Top 10 companies for the eighth consecutive year in the National Association For Female Executives in the US in 2015.

In line with HR, employees too are required to be periodically sensitized about the importance of encouraging and supporting the diversity agenda of the organization. People should be encouraged to formally report, any instance of discrimination that they have observed with the guarantee of complete confidentiality. Such efforts will bear fruit only when everyone partakes in it with utmost togetherness.

### Coming to terms

Managing for diversity implies going beyond regular compliance or "feel good" consensus-seeking approaches. Managing diversity indicates challenging comfort zones, pushing your boundaries, and encouraging constructive differences to unleash creativity. Promoting diversity entails recognizing different approaches to problem solving and value creation. This is required to be driven by leadership intent and supported by frameworks that percolate throughout the organization. In fact, intent even precedes strategy; it is about a genuine desire based on belief and commitment.

This is important since intent precedes even the enablers such as policy, operations and capability!