Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes

Emerald Article: Defining diversity: the evolution of diversity
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Defining diversity: the evolution of diversity

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Abstract

Purpose – The Hospitality Industry Diversity Institute (Hidi) has put together a review of diversity research that looks at the entrance of diversity into the management conversation, how it compares and contrasts with affirmative action, the transformation of diversity into a broad based and inclusive concept, and some concerns with a broad diversity definition. This paper aims to address these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology includes qualitative archival research which has been done to establish the review. The design of the paper flows through the entrance of diversity to an inclusion of diversity today, with a concern on a broad definition of diversity.

Findings – The research has led the author to affirm The Diversity Task Force's 2001 definition of diversity, whereby diversity includes "all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals" (Diversity Task Force, 2001).

Research limitations/implications – Hidi wishes to be mindful of a broad definition of diversity and emphasizes the importance of recognizing that individuals with primary dimensions may have very different secondary dimensions. Research has been limited to pre-existing articles. Further research could include broad-based diversity initiatives, the differences of diversity at a cultural level, and dimensions in diversity that are relevant to the workplace.

Originality/value – The originality of this paper stems from its attempt to define the broad concept of diversity as it has evolved. In all industries, valuing all of the components of an individual is crucial to an organization's success. This paper's value is in providing information to help those organizations, specifically the hospitality industry, and society better understand diversity.

Keywords Definition, Diversity, Employees, Hospitality, Hotels, Management, Organizations, Restaurant, Workforce

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Diversity is omnipresent; it is part of our everyday reality. However, in order to truly understand what diversity means, one must first define it, which, as will become apparent in this white paper, is a formidable task. The US Department of Commerce, under the guidance of former Vice President Al Gore, created a Diversity Task Force that sponsored a benchmarking study of diversity, *Best Practices in Achieving Workforce Diversity*. This study also pointed out that "one of the major stumbling blocks in discussions surrounding diversity is its very definition" (Diversity Task Force, 2001).

Recognizing the importance of defining diversity in order to gain a better understanding of diversity, the Hospitality Industry Diversity Institute (Hidi) has put together a review of diversity research in order to: illustrate the emergence of the concept of diversity into management discussions, discuss how the definition of diversity has broadened over time to become more inclusive, present current concerns with a broad-based diversity definition and to put forth its own definition of diversity.

2. The entrance of diversity

The entrance of the term diversity into the equity/affirmative action discussion is traced to the 1978 Supreme Court Case *Regents of University of California* v. *Bakke*, when Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote that:

> [...] the attainment of a diverse student body was a compelling state interest because a diverse student body would promote the "vigorous exchange of ideas" and therefore, "using race as a basis for university admission is a special concern of the First Amendment and important to the state (Peterson, 1999, p. 19).

Diversity's entrance into the management discussion can be traced to the 1987 Hudson Institute report, *Workforce 2000*, which stated that women, blacks, Hispanics and immigrants would make up 85 percent of new job seekers by the year 2000 (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000).

Although the findings of *Workforce 2000* were challenged, this report led to a realization that managers would no longer be managing a homogeneous workforce. In fact, as Tsui *et al.* (1992, p. 549) pointed out, "more and more individuals are likely to work with people who are demographically different from them in terms of age, gender, race, and ethnicity". During the 1990s, diversity management programs were introduced, in the USA, the UK and elsewhere, with the goal of:

> [...] increasing the rates of participation of women and ethnic minorities, improving career prospects for these people, incorporating wider perspectives into the decision-making processes and helping organizations reach new, and formerly untapped, markets. (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000).

3. Impetus for diversity conversation

Even before diversity entered the management conversation, the 1964 Civil Rights Acts made it illegal for companies to discriminate in the hiring or management of employees on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The Civil Rights Act and the subsequent Executive Order 11246, which requires government contractors "to take affirmative action to overcome past patterns of discrimination," led to the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and began the equity /affirmative action conversation (Herring, 2009). However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, private companies began to realize that these legal mandates were "insufficient to effectively manage organizational diversity" and began to offer training programs aimed at valuing diversity (Herring, 2009).

In subsequent years, the protected classes expanded to include white women, veterans, people over the age of 40 and people with physical or mental disabilities. This expansion provided for the inclusion of white males that fell within the broader-based protected classes. However, Peterson (1999, p. 20) pointed out that "emphasis was placed on difference and softened on oppression, facilitating the maintenance of the status quo," which "muddled the equity focus". During the 1990s, researchers began promoting the "business case" for diversity, in part because a more diverse workforce was seen as enhancing the overall business. As Herring (2009, p. 210) points out:

> [...] even if the shift from affirmative action to diversity has "tamed" what began as a radical fight for equality, workforce diversity has become an essential business concern in the twenty-first century".

Thus, the political and legal interest in diversity transformed into an economic interest and companies were warned that a failure to effectively manage their diverse workforce would lead to poor performance or even place the company's image at risk (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). Furthermore, the increased globalization of the marketplace enforced the understanding that traditional homogeneous and mono-cultural organizations were no longer effective (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). The increasingly "eclectic mix" of employees meant that employers needed to create an environment that not only recognized unique differences, but accepted and even valued these differences in order to foster "positive working relationships among *all* employees"(Capowski, 1996, p. 13).

In a seminal article, Thomas (1990, p. 108) pointed out that *hiring* a diverse workforce was not the problem; rather, the inability of managers to *manage* their diverse workforce caused many "women and blacks" to "plateau and lose their drive and quit" or be "fired". He argues that this inability to manage diversity "hobbles them [the managers] and the companies they work for" (Thomas, 1990, p. 108). He goes on to state that:

> […] women and minorities no longer need a boarding pass, they need an upgrade. The problem is not getting them in at the entry level, the problem is making better use of their potential at every level, especially in middle-management and leadership positions (Thomas, 1990).

The late 1990s, saw the promulgation of Thomas' recognition that diversity is a reality and that a company's success hinges on their ability to effectively manage their workforce diversity. Liff (1999) suggested managing diversity as an alternative approach to equality, because managing diversity focuses on understanding people as individuals, rather than making assumptions about the needs and potential of individuals based on whether that person is of a specific gender or ethnic group. However, she recognized that managing diversity could be understood as an equality strategy, in part because it claimed to be able to recognize employees' differences, while ensuring "that policies and procedures did not treat them inequitably." Diversity remains a hot topic today, particularly after the EEOC released data in early 2009 showing that more people reported discrimination in 2008 than ever before (Hannah, 2009).

4. How diversity compares/contrasts with affirmative action
The 1990s also saw increased unease about affirmative action policies, which strengthened the attractiveness of diversity management and its inclusive philosophy (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). Mor Barak (2000, p. 50) suggested that organizations needed to "break away from the very narrow definitions [of diversity] traditionally used in affirmative action programs" and use "broader concepts that capture the nature of individual differences in the context of the work organization".

By the mid-2000s, two general approaches to understanding workforce diversity developed: one that took a narrow view and defined diversity only as it related to equal employment opportunity and affirmative action and a second that broadly defined diversity as a concept which includes every way in which people can differ (Carrell *et al.*, 2006). According to Todd Campbell, the former Manager of the Society for Human Resource Management's in-house diversity initiative, affirmative action "focuses on recruiting and hiring a group of people of particular races, genders or cultures,"

whereas diversity management attempts to "maximize the potential of all employees in direct benefit to the organization" (Carrell *et al.*, 2006, p. 6).

Although the focus of some diversity initiatives on outcomes, such as the number of upwardly-mobile minorities, invites a comparison between diversity management and affirmative action, the underlying reason companies embrace diversity is to gain a competitive advantage by celebrating the individual (Nazarko, 2004). In fact, it is the celebration of the individual that has contributed to the popularity of diversity initiatives. Cheng (1994, p. 54) concurs, pointing out:

> If I value you only as a category which I can fill to stave off the EEO, or value you only as far as I am able to co-opt you into my immutable dominant culture by retrofitting your culture into it, or value you only as a jobholder, then I am unable to value all of you. Without all of you, there is no true diversity. Without the full range of who you are, your life and work are split. In this case, diversity becomes no more than a politically correct version of modernity's "park your brains (and your soul) at the door" job design.

Thomas (1990, p. 114) summarizes the objective of diversity, which is "not to assimilate minorities and women into a dominant white male culture but to create a dominant heterogeneous culture". Creating a new dominant heterogeneous culture also requires a company to define a set of organizational values that transcend the "interests, desires, and preferences of any one group" (Thomas, 1990, p. 116).

Diversity initiatives also sought to differentiate themselves from the backlash associated with many affirmative action programs. Proponents of diversity point out that workforce diversity is inevitable, particularly as organizations globalize their operations (Milliken and Martins, 1996). Further, the goal of diversity is not to focus on any one particular group, but to "maximize the potential for *all* employees for the benefit of the organization," thereby strengthening the organization, which is "something employees can understand" (Frase-Blunt, 2003, p. 141). Hill (2009, p. 47) points out that:

> [...] successful diversity efforts are built on moving beyond tolerance to celebration, and are based on the realization that everyone has sexual orientation and gender identity [...] while also recognizing that everyone has race, gender, and so on.

Enduring diversity programs are:

> [...] not based on representational deficiencies (i.e. diversity is valued only because some groups are underrepresented), but rather on the intrinsic worth of plurality, on the idea that everyone must be included while honoring that "difference" is a fundamental human right" (Hill, 2009, pp. 47-8).

5. Moving from diversity to inclusion

In seeking to differentiate diversity from affirmative action programs, the definition of diversity shifted away from only being concerned with women and minorities. The Diversity Task Force's 2001 study defined diversity as including "all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals" (Diversity Task Force, 2001). This study emphasizes the importance of including secondary dimensions of an individual, such as "communication style, work style, organizational role/level, economic status, and geographic origin" into the diversity definition, rather than focusing only on primary dimensions, such as "race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability and sexual orientation" (Diversity Task Force, 2001). According to

Herring (2009, p. 209), diversity "aims to create an inclusive culture that values and uses the talents of all would-be members".

Another reason for the shift to a more broad-based definition of diversity is that people with non-visible differences, such as sexual orientation, "can also experience discrimination and as a result not be able to utilize their full potential at work" (Mor Barak, 2000, p. 51). Although there are state and local anti-discrimination laws that protect sexual orientation diversity and 470 (94 percent) of *Fortune* 500 companies provide non-discrimination protection for their gay and lesbian employees, sexual orientation is not yet protected at the federal level (Lazin, 2007). Race and gender began to be understood as the "traditional diversity considerations," but modern diversity "encompasses everything from thinking styles, problem-solving approaches, experiences, competencies, work habits, and management styles to ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, and generational insight" (Kennedy, 2009, p. 49).

This change was reflected in a 2006 study (Carrell *et al.*, 2006, p. 5), which examined "employer definitions and perceptions of workforce diversity" in order to compare them to a 1994 study published in the *Labor Law Journal*, when the "concept of workforce diversity was new" and the term had only been utilized for about five years. Their results showed that not only did more organizations have written workforce diversity policies or programs, but that respondents identified more characteristics as components of diversity than were indicated in the previous study (Carrell *et al.*, 2006).

Another reason to expand the definition of diversity was to include dimensions of diversity that were relevant to the workplace, such as educational background, work experience, job status, tenure, learning style and personality type (Schmidt, 2009; Jones, 1999). Additionally, as Markus (2008, p. 651) suggested, there was a concern that "paying attention to ethnic and racial differences is at odds with our [American] ideals of individual equality and our belief that, at the end of the day, people are people". She goes on to ask, "Doesn't highlighting racial and ethnic differences come close to stereotyping? And isn't even talking about race and ethnicity sort of, well, racist and ethnocentric [...] ?" (Markus, 2008, p. 651) Furthermore, Thomas (2008, p. 207) points out that "a difference that is paramount in one situation may be of no significance in another".

Moving toward a more inclusive definition of diversity also elicited a reexamination of some diversity basics, such as race, ethnicity and gender. Markus (2008, p. 653) found psychological race research to be about "countering assumptions of group difference and dispelling stereotypes" and research on ethnicity and culture to be about "identifying and explaining difference," leading it to be "accused of generating stereotypes". She goes on to point out that racial and ethnic differences can be both positive and negative – they can unite people and be a source of pride and identity, but can also be a source of prejudice and devaluation (Markus, 2008). There has also been a move towards looking within racial and ethnic groups, rather than lumping unique cultures under one categorical label. For example, the term "Hispanic" encompasses individuals "composed of several unique cultural backgrounds," such as Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Latin or Mexican "within a single racial category" (Tran and Dawson, 2008, p. 73).

Yet another reason for a broader understanding of diversity is that there may be differences even within a particular group (Ollapally and Bhatnager, 2009). Obviously, not all individuals with the same primary dimensions will have the same secondary dimensions. Fundamentally, a broad-based, inclusive definition of diversity has helped

support the competitive advantage of diversity. As Gilbert and Ivancevich (2001, pp. 1333-4) discuss, "Majority employees grow to realize that all organizational members are essential for company survival and that different perspectives have the potential to enhance problem solving and decision making".

6. Current concerns with diversity definition

Difficulty with implementing diversity initiatives led to criticism, in part because "many diversity interventions were shown to have backfired" since they often "led to outbursts of antagonism and resentment from those who had been subjected to the scrutiny of difference" (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). In part, this was because employers sought to change the attitudes of their employees, rather than changing the culture of the company itself (Caudron and Hayes, 1997). As Linnehan and Konrad (1999, p. 402) discuss, broad definitions of diversity can "obscure issues of intergroup inequality" because focusing on "managing individual differences will not address the issues of privilege and stigmatization that contaminate intergroup relations".

Moreover, the promulgation of "off-the-shelf" diversity programs often reinstated and reinforced "the patterns of difference [. . .] while giving the appearance of new, better possibilities" (Jones *et al.*, 2000, p. 378). The research that has been done is ambiguous in its conclusions, particularly regarding the efficacy of diversity training. For example, some claim that diversity training is a complete failure (Hemphill and Haines, 1997). Others claim that only a third of diversity training programs experience any long-term positive effects (Rynes and Rosen, 1995).

Faced with the fear of alienating part of their workforce, companies began adopting a more broadly defined approach to diversity management, which critics now fear has "diluted the original intent [of diversity management] as a tool for creating opportunities for women and minorities in America" (Caudron and Hayes, 1997). In Bell and Hartmann (2007), one of their subjects, Luke, critiqued diversity discourse for dealing with differences rather than equality. When asked what diversity meant to him, Luke responded:

> I don't like it because [. . .] it's a get away with it word. It's a word that avoids the real word [. . .] because so much of what we call diversity is a demographic condition. Diversity is something you write down in columns, so many of this kind, so many of this kind [. . .]. But it doesn't carry with it [. . .] the why are these in different columns" (Bell and Hartmann, 2007, p. 911).

Other researchers critique the inclusivity of diversity for presenting a universalistic approach in order to be more acceptable to white males, but which may fail to deliver change as long as the social structures which initiated the inequities are left standing (Point and Singh, 2003). In fact, a broad-based definition of diversity may not only marginalize certain differences, but may advance essentialism "by promoting that a "different" viewpoint can only come from a group designated as different; that is, white males may be individuals with individual views, but Hispanic males or Asian women, for example, are of a monolithic, essential belief system and when you hire one, you get that essential viewpoint" (Peterson, 1999). Understanding diversity without looking at its roots in the equity discourse, as Luke pointed out, may obscure why there are differences in the first place (Bell and Hartmann, 2007). Critics of a broad-based understanding of diversity also complain that the plethora of dimensions that are considered diverse renders the terminology meaningless (Peterson, 1999).

Further, the "upbeat naivety" of the diversity paradigm may fail to acknowledge past discrimination and therefore may prevent organizations from preventing future discrimination and racism (Riach, 2009, p. 320; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000).

It is also important to acknowledge that the definition of diversity depends on the cultural context of the organization and the society within which the organization exists (Mor Barak, 2000). Shen *et al.* (2009, p. 235) point out diversity issues are different in each country:

> While gender inequality is the oldest and most common diversity issue worldwide, religion and ethnicity separate people in India and Middle East and household status (hukou) differentiates off-farm migrants from urbanites in China. Chinese rural migrants are routinely looked down on by urbanites and mistreated at the workplace and in society. Multiculturalism has always been the most important dimension of diversity in Western countries, including the EU nations, Australia and New Zealand, where there are a large number of international migrants with diverse cultural backgrounds. Racial equality appears to be the predominant issue in both USA and South Africa where there has been a long history of systematic discrimination against blacks and other ethnic minorities.

In a study looking at local responses in Aotearoa/New Zealand to USA-derived diversity models, Jones *et al.* (2000, p. 377) found that:

> [. . .] universal set[s] of values could not be easily translated across cultural boundaries as they have the potential to place people in a situation of cultural conflict, compromise, or even a culture clash.

and that the multinational company disseminating its policies and procedures worldwide "was acting in a very ethnocentric manner".

Despite these criticisms, Jones (1999, p. 8) points out that a broad definition of diversity will allow "a greater number of individuals [to] see the relevance" and enable them to form a "personal connection to this issue," which will allow them access to the discussion and implementation of diversity initiatives. Hill (2009, pp. 48-9) also recommends that diversity initiatives be broad-based and include not only minorities, but also non-minorities, recognizing that this concept may be "prickly" for some, because it "demands that we simultaneously focus on our ethical obligation to recognize the pain of historically excluded minority and underrepresented groups, while taking into account the valuable contributions of dominant group members". Despite concerns that a broad-based focus on diversity may dilute the claims of historically discriminated-against groups, it also enhances the ability to have the conversation in the first place and, hopefully, make a difference.

7. Conclusion

In order to accurately and adequately define diversity, the Hidi looked at the entrance of diversity into the management conversation, how it compares and contrasts with affirmative action, the transformation of diversity into a broad-based and inclusive concept and some concerns with a broad diversity definition. Hidi's research has led it to affirm The Diversity Task Force's definition, whereby diversity includes "all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals" (Diversity Task Force, 2001).

However, Hidi also wishes to be mindful of the concerns with a broad definition of diversity, and cautions companies to be cognizant of discrimination as a result of both

primary and secondary dimensions. Further, Hidi wishes to emphasize the importance of recognizing that individuals with similar primary dimensions may have very different secondary dimensions. In all industries, but particularly in the hospitality industry, which is founded on hospitable service from a diverse staff to diverse guests, valuing all of the components of an individual is crucial to an organization's success. And as hospitality companies and the hospitality industry as a whole learn to embrace the characteristics and experiences that define people as individuals, they will truly embody the meaning of hospitality.

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