

23 June 2008

Diversity and Organizational Culture

Work-life balance must be a priority for organizations not because it is a responsibility but because there is a strategic payoff. The work-life initiative generates and implants a culture that employs practices and resources to help employees better handle the stress of work and non-work areas. Work-life support begins with a commitment to connecting diversity with organizational culture.

It is therefore necessary to ensure that each and every individual is provided an environment where he is able to contribute effectively and feel satisfied. Where a supportive work culture is found, the employees apparently consider the value of their work to be reasonably high. Research shows that investment in work-life leadership is actually enhancement in end-result business performance. This investment in human capital must be done keeping diversity in mind.

The term 'diversity' has a much larger scope here. Diversity goes beyond recognizing and respecting ethnic differences, gender differences and the like. It goes beyond being unbiased and non-discriminating. In this context, diversity implies acknowledging the multiplicity and range of countless circumstances that make up life. Diversity is about admitting to the various roles and responsibilities, both contrasting and complementary to their careers, that professionals encounter always and everywhere.

Diversity lies in the inclusion of more creative and productive solutions for a more supportive work-place. Diversity is about being accessible when an employee needs support. More importantly it helps with those extra hours as well as emergencies. It involves talent management- attraction and retention of talented people with the abilities and aptitude. Diversity tries to establish work-life initiatives that mould thoughts and actions of the employees. This steers them towards exhibiting behavior that finally becomes healthy organizational culture.

With workplace trends changing ever so often, organizations are recommended emphasis on flexibility as the management mantra for coping with the changes.

Building the case for work/life strategies

Achieving work-life balance is the ultimate objective of the initiatives. It is important to remember that organizations provide resources to help employees better manage their work/life priorities. They do not "create balance" in people's lives. Rather they are not in a position to do so. This is so because solutions to balance vary from individual to individual. The complex business environment today has led to a highly heterogeneous work force where homogenous blanket solutions are absolutely impractical. This is reason enough for regarding diversity as the launching pad for work-life strategies.

The commitment levels of employees are strongly related to managers acknowledging the work-life needs. Stress and absenteeism has increased over the last decade and is



TenStep Supplemental Paper

primarily due to high work-life conflict. Employees are attracted to and feel the need to be retained by employers who offer opportunities such as flexi-hours.

The overall goal is one of creating and sustaining a culture that nourishes wellness of both individual and organization. This gives the organization an edge over the others in the market as it promotes the organization's image as a preferred employer. Prospective employees find the culture inviting while the current ones find it satisfying.

Ensuring a healthy bonding creates dedicated employees who are satisfied with their supportive workplace and therefore with their work too. The wide range of all-inclusive programs and polices, benefits and resources have a sense of openness and timelessness. They do not just cater to specific days, weeks or months but are intended to lend a hand to the employee throughout life. The intention is to be there with the employee at all times and help him to do justice to business objectives and personal commitments.

Flexible work arrangement is the provision for various flexible work options such as reduced work hours, flexi-time, job-sharing, modified workweek, flexi-place (working from home or from an off-site), and phased retirement. Employees value these, and some options such as job sharing have found favor with the customers as well.

In order to become a favored employer, organizations need to have in place:

- A dynamic leadership whose vision encompasses everyone – employee, employer, customer, shareholder
- A holistic reward that is all-inclusive
- Continual internal evaluation to identify obstacles that hinder healthy changes in organizational culture
- Communication and constant reinforcement of work-life resources
- Appropriate management of work load, especially with respect to cyclical projects that have spurts of crunch times

These elements are essential yet diverse in nature.

Diversity is undeniably in the spotlight. It puts into place a broader framework for working out and understanding priorities and giving a human perspective to the process of resource planning. Diversity must be the focus of the work-life model incorporated into the culture of the organization. Concerted efforts on this front are undoubtedly a tactical advantage to employers.