

Perceptions of Frontline Managers Practicing Diversity Management

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For over 30 years, organizations have engaged in programs to address the growing presence of diverse populations in their ranks, and researchers have attempted to identify and quantify a link between diversity and enterprise performance. There is a general lack of understanding of how organizations benefit from increased diversity and the role of frontline managers in that process. The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the perceptions and lived experiences of frontline managers in their role of executing diversity management programs. The study's framework focused on (a) diversity management, (b) managing people, and (c) team performance. The data collection process involved interviewing 12 frontline managers from a variety of industry sectors using a semistructured, conversational interviewing protocol. The open, hand-coded analysis revealed patterns of thought and behaviors relating to managing individuals, managing the complexity of diversity, and managing diverse teams for high performance. The original concept of diversity management was in response to the growing diversity in the workplace and was intended to develop the capacity among managers to manage the resulting diversity mix. The study findings indicated that a common definition of diversity management is possible, that managing diversity requires a competence with all dimensions of diversity, and that there is a set of management skills that can yield better performance with teams of diverse composition. The results of this study can have a positive impact on theory, practice, and general social acceptance of diversity.

Keywords: *diversity management, team performance, managing, leading, management skills*

Introduction

In the last few decades, the question of how to manage diverse groups has become increasingly important (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). The problem of managing today's diverse workforce, however, does not stem from the diversity of the workforce itself but from the inability of corporate managers to fully comprehend its dynamics, divest themselves of their personal prejudicial attitudes, and creatively manage the potential benefit of a diverse workforce (Barak, 2017). Team diversity has both positive and negative effects on performance based on how conflicts are managed (Wu, Zhao, Zuo, & Zillante, 2019). The research has not kept up with the need for tools and processes to manage the increasing levels of diversity in the workplace.

The subject of this research was diversity management, which is distinguished from other forms of diversity study by the intent to affect business performance.

Research Question: What are the attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences of frontline managers in their role of executing diversity management programs?

Organizations are spending billions of dollars annually on diversity management efforts and there is still little evidence that they are benefitting from those efforts (Madera, Dawson, & Neal, 2017). If frontline managers do not embrace diversity management programs, the diversity management effort will be disrupted (Madera et al., 2017).

Background

There are millions of practitioners (managers, leaders, and team members) who may find benefit from scholarly inquiry into what has been called the most complex human resource challenge of the 21st century (Heitner, Kahn, & Sherman, 2013). For more than 20 years, researchers have been attempting to confirm the relationship between diversity and performance (Kochan et al., 2003). There is still an incoherent picture of the relationship between team diversity and performance (van Veelen & Ufkes, 2019). There has yet to be consistent, replicable, predictable, and sustainable evidence in the scholarly literature that supports the relationship, which leaves managers and leaders in the field uncertain about the efficacy of diversity management as a management skill or organizational strategy (Thomas, 2011).

Field managers and executives have a limited view of the impact of diversity in their organizations (Kravitz, 2010). Workforce diversity is not a transient or static concept (Barak, 2017). Organizations have not been able to optimally harvest the diversity dividend in the absence of proper integration with strategy (Das, 2019). A better understanding of the impact of diversity management on organizational performance would help managers in developing the models, tools, assessments, and management principles that will make diversity management a mainstay of modern management practice. Without such tools, managers will be unable to understand or identify the constructive business benefits of diversity (Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, & Monga, 2009).

What is missing is a focused approach to discovering how to deliver the benefits of diversity management. The reason for the dearth of research on the business implications of diversity may be the myopic focus on diversity-related inputs and outcomes, rather than diversity management as a process (Carstens & De Kock, 2017). A review of the existing literature revealed that the focus has not been moving in the direction of process. However, the literature does suggest that achieving the objective of learning how to make diversity management a valuable skill will require a common definition, a common construct, a consistent unit of study, and more use of empirical study methods supported by researchers and practitioners alike (Guillaume, Dawson, Woods, Sacramento, & West, 2013).

Literature on Diversity Management as a Skill

Nietzsche once said, "The most fundamental form of human stupidity is forgetting what we were trying to do in the first place" (Solomon, 2000, p. 49). The arc of scholarship on diversity management seems to have fallen into that trap. The original conception is barely recognizable in the studies that have been performed in recent decades. Regarding the arc of scholarship and the different foci of diversity management studies over the decades, some of the differences align with the time period of the studies; others follow themes that have endured for decades.

Diversity Management

The primary conceptual framework for this study was the early works by R. Thomas (1990, 2011) and S. Page (2007) that introduced diversity management and cognitive diversity concepts to the business community. The original goal of managing diversity (diversity management) was to develop our capacity to accept, incorporate, and empower the diverse human talent of the most diverse nation on Earth (Thomas, 1990). Since that time, there has been a divergence of thought in the field and in the academy about the intent of diversity management practice and study efforts.

The existing literature on diversity management covers decades of research on the social (Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006), psychological (Guillaume et al., 2013), political (Richard, Murthi, & Ismail, 2007), and cultural (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008) aspects of diversity. The literature also covers the impact of diversity on public (Choi & Rainey, 2010), private (Rupprecht, Birner, Gruber, & Mulder, 2011), and community-based (Hur & Strickland, 2015) organizations and institutions. Some studies cover U.S. organizations (Goode, 2014) and others cover non-U.S. organizations (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011). Diversity research has used units of study such as individual, team, firm (Milliken & Martins, 1996), top management team (Buyl, Boone, Hendriks, & Matthyssens, 2011), and entrepreneurial ventures (Zhou & Rosini, 2015). Diversity has been studied as a unitary concept and it has been dissected into a wide range of dimensions for more discrete analysis. The number of attributes that can engender diversity perceptions is almost infinite (Guillaume et al., 2013).

The Diversity–Performance Paradox

Kulik (2014) claimed that diversity management can deliver organizational benefit but only if it is managed effectively. However, when the increasing diversity at work is not being managed effectively, it can result in lower revenues, higher costs, and greater disruptions to business operations (Guillaume et al., 2013). Both enterprise managers and researchers have advanced an agenda on diversity based on their own interests without regard to the interests of others (Kulik, 2014). Ivancevich and Gilbert (2000) called for a new agenda that demanded collaboration between researchers and administrators.

Patterns of Study

After reviewing the literature, several observations became apparent. There are two patterns worth noting about the literature on diversity management (and related topics). One is chronological and the other is thematic. They often overlap but still assert a clear pattern of thinking about the subject.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the beginning of a new approach to people management called *managing diversity* (Kulik, 2014). The new approach gave rise to research that described the transition from social and political aspects of diversity to business interests (Thomas, 1990). Then came the rise of efforts to confirm the efficacy of diversity management (i.e., is it a legitimate business management discipline? Kochan et al., 2003) and the rise of rhetoric declaring the inherent value of diversity (Carstens & De Kock, 2017).

The 2000s have been characterized by a near abandonment of the diversity performance assumption (researchers became discouraged that the link could never be confirmed; McMahan, 2010) and more examination of discrete elements of diversity against known performance factors for teams, firms, and individuals (VanAlstine, Cox, & Roden, 2013; Haon, Gotteland, & Fornerino, 2009; Buyl et al., 2011).

Recently, there has been a return of interest in exploring the performance aspects of diversity management and asking different questions (Roberge & van Dick, 2010). Rather than asserting that diversity does or does not contribute to performance, researchers began asking about the conditions

that cause diverse teams to over- or underperform a more homogeneous team (Olsen & Martins, 2012). That conceptual framework (performance focused) is the basis of this study.

Management Skills

The second conceptual framework for this research is the effort to clarify the meaning and the practice of management and leadership. The conception of enterprise (business) management began with the work of Taylor and continued through the work of Maslow, Drucker, and others. The last 3 decades have seen a near abandonment of management as a topic in favor of leadership as a topic. There is confusion about the meaning and application of leadership or management. Zaleznik (1992) was the first to assert that leadership and management are not the same. Later, Kotter (2007) and Vroom and Jago (2007) summarized the difference based on actual focus.

Kotter (2007) suggested that leadership is about coping with change and management is about coping with complexity. Erwin and Kent (2005) defined a process to separate, distinguish, and integrate the concepts so they could be applied in practice. Diversity management in theory is identified as a change initiative (Gonzalez, 2010). For that reason we could characterize diversity management as a leadership issue. Diversity management in practice involves the day-to-day interactions of teams and managers. The theories and concepts of people management were the focus of this study.

Team Performance

The final conceptual framework for this study was the systems approach to team performance presented by McGrath, Arrow, and Berdahl (2000). The concept of teaming and teams has been around for decades and a large number of studies have focused on what makes teams effective. As with management, the scholarship on teams has benefitted from the practical application of teamwork practices by field managers. Cohen and Bailey (1997) defined *team* as a collection of individuals who are interdependent, who share responsibility for outcomes, and who represent an intact social entity inside a larger social system. The use of intact entities (teams) to accomplish organizational goals is of increasing importance to business enterprises (Rubino, Avery, Volpone, & Ford, 2014). The simplest depiction of team dynamics is the input–process–outcomes model advanced by McGrath (1984). Input–process–outcomes and its minor derivative input–mediator–outcomes have provided the framework for studying team effectiveness for the past 4 decades (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008).

A common variable in the study of team effectiveness is the level of team cohesion (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009). Team cohesion occurs more readily when the team is composed of more homogeneous members and social loafing results from greater diversity (Rubino et al., 2014). These concepts in the literature represent the current trends on team effectiveness. However, recent trends are beginning to treat teams as complex, adaptive, dynamic systems (McGrath et al., 2000). We chose that conceptual frame (complex systems) to explore the performance of diverse teams.

Method

This study aimed to identify knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, lived experiences, and practices of line managers. The framework of the study focused on three areas: (a) existing concepts of people management, (b) the performance concept of diversity management, and (c) the systems theory of team performance. The sampling frame for this study consisted of successful line managers with responsibility for achieving business goals with a diverse team composition. In addition, the focus was on the experiences of frontline managers who had knowledge of diversity management and who

contributed directly to their company's performance. The data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire (see Appendix) based on the literature review and the inferences from the research question. The questions were crafted in a facilitative format that evoked rich discussion.

Ten open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit insights about the research question. The collected data were narrative and expansive. The data covered a broad range of managerial experiences and touched on a number of themes relative to diversity management, management skills, and team performance. The 12 respondents were recruited using a recruitment letter posted for a network of contacts on LinkedIn. They represented 10 distinct industry sectors including technology, professional service, food and beverages, telecommunications, and others. The participants consisted of four males and eight females. There were six Black and six White participants. Four of the managers were 30–39 years of age, five were ages 40–49, three were ages 50–59, and one was age 60+. Their tenure as managers ranged from 5 years to over 25 years. In addition, there were five managers of blue-collar (production) teams and seven managers of white-collar (professional) teams. The managers also represented organizations that ranged in size from less than 100 to over 50,000. Overall the mix of participants met and even exceeded the diversity requirements of the design.

Results

We produced over 148 pages of transcribed data. From the transcripts, we identified 104 relevant statements or insights. The insights are arranged by the three major themes and six subthemes. The three major themes are (a) perceptions of managing people, (b) perceptions of managing diversity, and (c) perceptions of managing teams. The six subthemes are arranged under the relevant major theme (see Table 1). Direct quotes from the participants are presented to illustrate the insights.

Table 1: Themes, Participant References, and Total Comments

Themes	Participants (N = 12)	Comments (N = 104)
Managing people		
Principles of managing people	10	17
Characteristics of good managers	11	16
Managing diversity		
Common definition of managing diversity	11	22
Benefits and challenges of diversity	8	12
Managing teams		
Behaviors of effective team managers	11	26
The value of well-managed diversity	8	11

Major Theme 1: Perceptions of Managing People

The first topical theme of this study relates to how frontline managers get the best from each individual contributor on the team. The study participants had a broad range of insights on this topic, which fit under two subthemes: (a) principles of good management and (b) characteristics of effective managers.

Principles of good management

The participants based their perceptions of good management skills on their experiences with managers they worked for as well as their own experience of managing others. The insights were revealed in stories of successful management outcomes or stated as principles. The principles that emerged along with sample comments were as follows:

- Get to know them (“You get to know what motivates them, why they’re there…”).
- Give them responsibility (“My manager gave me the autonomy to be great…”).
- Give them what they need to perform (“Give them the tools to succeed and support them in any way that you possibly can…”).
- Know yourself (“A lot of time I’m not a good people person. I’m not a likable person. I’m stringent. I’m hard, rigid, but I believe in people…”).
- Listen (“I am a good listener and I’m willing to take the time to sit and talk through problems…”).

Characteristics of Effective Managers

The managers had definite ideas about what constitutes a good manager of people. They mentioned several traits, such as (a) coaching, (b) trusting, (c) fairness, and (d) developing others that are essential to perform as people managers. They also acknowledged that managing people is not for everyone.

One participant said it this way: “A coach is somebody who is more alongside you, supporting you versus somebody who is more directive. A coach wants to develop people.” Another participant offered this insight: “Some people are just not suited for that (managing). They don’t like the responsibility.”

Major Theme 2: Perceptions of Managing Diversity

The second topical theme of this study relates to how frontline managers navigate the growing diversity in the workplace. The study participants had similar insights on this topic, which fit under the two subthemes: (a) common definition of managing diversity and (b) challenges and benefits of diversity.

Common Definition of Managing Diversity

The interview protocol included a definition of diversity management (a management discipline; a practice designed to get the best from all employees recognizing the uniqueness of each person), which the participants were invited to consider (accept or reject). Overall, the managers embraced the definition and gave examples of how it fit with their experience at managing diverse teams. A representative comment was this:

When I think about diversity management, I think of having a team that can provide diversity of thought and experience and also provide an opportunity for people to have exposure to and work with people that they may not otherwise have. It can also help you understand a customer segment that you’re trying to sell into. It can help you look at problems differently.

Challenges and Benefits of Diversity

The managers were very practical about the pluses and minuses of diversity. On balance, diversity was a plus for them, but they recognized the importance of acknowledging the challenges that come with diversity. This quote from a participant illustrates that sentiment: “It has certainly provided a

significant challenge to overcome, but I think if you embrace it fully, it can really turn into a positive.”

Major Theme 3: Perceptions of Managing Teams

The insights of the participants focused on the concept of managing diverse teams to achieve high performance. Their insights relate to the (a) behaviors of effective managers of diverse teams and (b) value of well-managed diversity on teams.

Behaviors of Effective Team Managers of Diverse Teams

Most of the managers considered themselves effective in getting the best from a diverse team. They offered several behaviors that made them effective. The behaviors that emerged along with sample comments were as follows:

Prefer diverse teams (“I definitely would prefer more of a diverse team... the reason is I like challenges. I don’t want a team that’s just going to say yes to everything”).

Manage conflict, tension, and discomfort (“You have to be able to deal with diversity and that’s not easy. It’s conflict management”).

Define team (“A team is ... a group of people that have the same goal, but they must rely on each other”).

Be a role model for diversity (“...have to be a role model. You have to essentially not only say it’s okay but to show that it is okay”).

Be open minded and honest (“...you can have the perfect mix but you got to have people who are open minded”).

It’s not personal (“...do not try to be everyone’s best friend... take the emotion out of managing. It’s not personal. It’s really not about you”).

The Value of Well-Managed Diversity on Teams

The managers felt that good management is the key to getting benefit from diversity on teams. They identified the value of diversity when it is managed well. One participant said, “By getting different opinions in the building, it opens your eyes to the possibilities that maybe you didn’t see before.” Another participant added, “...with more homogeneous teams, there are big holes in the decision-making.”

The perceptions of the managers were that the need for good management is essential for performance with diverse teams as illustrated by this summary quote: “Most people think that just by having diversity, you get better decisions. No, it’s when you manage that diversity that you get better decisions.”

Discussion

A lack of research on middle managers as leaders of diversity management efforts has led to a lack of knowledge about managers who navigate the reality of diversity on their teams and still manage to get positive results for their enterprises. This research led to some insights about how frontline managers perceive and exercise their role as the primary leaders of diversity management efforts in their respective organizations.

The literature review indicated there is a growing awareness that frontline managers are the key to effectively execute diversity management programs. This research confirmed that notion and demonstrated that frontline managers are aware of their role and want to use their skills and insights to make diversity management a winning strategy for their organizations. The managers in

this study disconfirmed the notion highlighted by McMahon (2010) that limited exploration of specific dimensions of diversity is the path to success in the field. They indicated that while specific dimensions of diversity (race, gender, personality type, age, etc.) are relevant on a case-by-case basis, it is a general competence with diversity that helps them manage the daily manifestations of diversity on their teams.

Managing People

The first theme, perceptions of managing people, addressed the fundamental role of frontline managers and the important relationship they have with the people they manage. The managers indicated that it is important to manage each individual as an individual. According to the managers in this study, there are a number of principles and characteristics that support effectiveness in managing individuals. Those principles could serve as a basis for effective management of individual workers, confirming and evolving from the research of Madera (2018) and Rodgers and Hunter (2004).

The participants revealed that the advent of increased diversity in the workplace brought with it additional management challenges. That confirms the findings of Gover and Duxbury (2012) that there are natural barriers to implementing diversity management. Many of the dysfunctions that arise with diverse groups might not be present with more homogeneous groups. For instance, the need to process differing opinions and come to consensus is often greater with a broadly diverse group with different backgrounds, points of view, and beliefs. The experiences and insights of the participants confirm Ivancevich and Gilbert's (2000) findings that diversity management efforts must be supported by results and that diversity management is a discipline designed for managers.

Managing Diversity

The second major theme that arose in this research, perceptions of managing diversity, addressed the growing reality that employees are increasingly diverse in a broad sense and that many organizations are investing in diversity management efforts. From their frontline positions, the managers identified a perspective on diversity management that keyed in on a common definition as well as a realistic assessment of the pluses and minuses of having more diversity on the teams. We used Thomas' definition (a management discipline designed to produce better business results with a diverse mix of employees) that was consistent in usage among the participants. Many of the managers gave examples that demonstrated how that definition fit what they have experienced. In addition, the majority of the participants had a positive response to diversity management as a concept and as a formal company initiative. Therefore, their insights confirm the notion expressed by Madera (2018) that frontline managers are a viable focus for getting direct benefit from the growing levels of diversity in the workplace. It was evident from the wisdom and insights from the managers that they saw their role as essential to the effective management of diverse teams.

The participants (managers) identified a broad range of diversity dimensions that included age, personality type, marital status, childcare needs and other family situations, years of experience, functional areas of expertise, work-from-home contractors versus in-office employees, sexual orientation, and national cultures. Some of these areas of difference play a bigger role in the workforce than race and gender. Some of the managers commented that race and gender are no longer an issue in most of their interactions with employees. That idea confirms the notion by Kochan et al. (2003) that a general competency with diversity is the skillset most managers need to develop. Kochan et al. specifically called for a sustained, systematic effort to develop managerial skills to translate diversity into results. That formula does not involve focus on any particular

dimension of diversity. Some specific dimensions of diversity will be evident at certain moments, but will not be a predominant factor over time.

Diversity challenges require a manager to be more attentive and involved. More attention by managers is one of the benefits of more diversity. In addition, there are some specific benefits of a highly diverse group. Those benefits include better (not faster) decisions, more innovation, easier talent recruitment, more learning, broader perspectives, and stronger outcomes and results. The benefits of diversity are the reason managers endure the process of dealing with the challenges of diversity. This outcome confirms the research of Morales and Rahe (2009) and of Cavarretta (2007).

Managing Diverse Teams

The third major theme, perceptions of managing teams, addressed the process of managing a diverse team to get high performance and better results. The comments by the managers brought perspective to the behaviors of effective team managers and to ways to get value from diverse teams. Being an effective manager of diverse teams begins with foundational skills at managing teams for performance. This insight confirms the findings of Omran, Mahmood, and Hussin (2009) that team management requires competence and skills to be effective. Getting the best from a diverse team requires a unique set of skills and a perspective that expects to find value in diversity.

The majority of the managers (10 of the 12) reported that they have come to prefer diverse teams, especially when their goal is improved performance and meeting objectives. The preference for diversity existed despite the realistic recognition that diversity introduces complexity and unique challenges to team management. This insight confirms the findings of Jain and Anjuman (2013) that complexity requires managers with skills and an understanding of human nature.

The reasons the managers gave for preferring diversity were practical, experiential, and philosophical. The practical reasons supported the findings of Aquino and Robertson (2017) that the benefit of diversity management derives from teams who make better decisions, solve problems, capture innovation, improve productivity, make more accurate predictions, and who operate more effectively and efficiently. The experience of managing diverse teams as an active process confirmed the findings in Carstens and De Kock (2017) that suggested that diversity management is a process (what you do) rather than a state (what you have). Philosophically, the managers almost universally held views that there is inherent value in diversity when properly managed. Those views support the findings of Hong and Page (2004) that diverse teams outperform homogeneous teams.

The advent of increased diversity may be difficult for some people to adjust to. It becomes necessary for the manager to be a role model at responding positively to diversity. No one on the team has more influence with the team than the manager of the team. The manager has to play the mediator to help everyone else understand each other and to translate differences into similarities. This finding aligns with the findings of Kulik (2014), Madera (2018), and Hall (2013) that suggested that line managers bear the pressure of managing diversity, that without line managers embracing diversity, the efforts will be disrupted, and that line managers must explain the value of diversity to the team. Homan (2019) stated that positive diversity mindsets are a necessary prerequisite to prevent problems and promote potential of diverse teams. That need requires a manager to be open minded, willing to learn, and focused on the desired outcomes of the operation.

Summary Insights

The role of manager is sometimes a one-on-one, day-to-day, face-to-face endeavor and is exercised differently with each employee. Still, the managers in this study advised that effective managers

learn to remain objective and not take the interactions with employees personally. That view resonates with the viewpoint shared by Holmberg and Tyrstrup (2010) and Harvey and Buckley (2002) that said that management behavior is designed to manage the everyday complexity of business operations and that managers are content to be in a support role and allow workers to be the stars of the operation. It also aligns with the findings of Beck and Harter (2014) that being a manager is a unique role that is different from other skilled-based functions in an organization. Being an advisor, mentor, and coach has to be balanced with being an objective arbiter of decisions and goals for the team. Most managers recognized that it (managing people) is not for everyone.

Finally, the managers in our study concluded that good management (more than leadership) is the key to getting benefit from a diverse team. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Jayne and Dipboye (2004), which posited that having a diverse workforce does not produce positive outcomes. When managed well, a diverse team can yield better decisions, more innovation, high performance, and sustainable results. But managers must first acknowledge and accept that it is easier to manage a team of like individuals. More diversity increases conflict, which helps explain why more diversity does not always lead to more team performance (Johnson, Nguyen, Groth, & White, 2018). Likeness yields less friction and more agreement. It also produces mediocre outcomes.

The participant managers were careful to seek out diversity to avoid the trap of close-minded or narrow thinking. It is not simply having more diversity that improves performance; it is when you manage that diversity that you get better outcomes. This finding disconfirms the popular notion in the literature (e.g., McMahon, 2010) that the diversity-performance link can be confirmed by finding the right combination of diversity dimensions. Without the exercise of effective management practices, no element of diversity will produce consistently positive results. Dynamic team diversity theory calls for managers to focus more on teams becoming more diverse (deliberately) rather than teams being more (naturally) diverse (Li, Meyer, Shemla, & Wegge, 2018). This idea also supports the conclusions of Berg (2012) that diverse teams will achieve either excellent results (when managed) or miserable results (when not managed).

Implications for Social Change

Diversity in society, like diversity in organizations, must be managed with the intent to demonstrate its inherent value while acknowledging its innate disruption. The managers in this study focused on managing diversity to improve performance and to clearly demonstrate added value from increasing diversity. The practice of doing things that help the entire team perform better was their preferred objective. These findings may help to overcome the stigma of diversity programs by providing insights and promoting more research that strive to find out what actually works to get value and improved performance from the diversity mix at work and in society, especially in light of the dynamic changes that are occurring in the nation and in the workplace.

Recommendations

For this study, the frontline team was the unit of study and the perceptions of frontline managers was the primary area of inquiry. We recommend that more studies be conducted using qualitative approaches and focusing on frontline managers to expand our knowledge base about the actual experience of getting results from a diverse team. The gap in the literature that we addressed was the lack of experiential data that confirms the real life performance factors of diverse teams. Rather than continue to speculate, we recommend that researchers continue to amass enough experiential data so that substantiated conclusions can be drawn about what works to get benefit from diversity management efforts. That should include other forms of qualitative research such as case study,

ethnography, and Delphi. Then research should move to a grounded theory approach to identify factors that have repeatedly proven to be important for high performance for diverse teams.

Conclusion

Prior research has focused on discrete elements of diversity and has assumed (without evidence) that more diversity contributes to improved performance. This research encourages more emphasis on the specific practices that are necessary to get benefit from the advent of increased diversity. Our study focused on a unit of study (the team) and a set of practices (management skills) and a proponent (frontline manager) that have been missing in prior research and prior practice.

The data indicated that (a) a general competence with diversity is more useful than an emphasis on any particular dimension of diversity; (b) diversity brings additional management challenges, which are outweighed by the benefits of a well-managed diverse team; (c) there are a set of management skills required to navigate the tension, conflict, and discomfort that come with increased diversity; and (d) well-managed diversity yields better team performance. The results point to a new direction for inquiry in the field of diversity management. The new approach focuses on skills and practice rather than awareness, emphasizes management more than leadership, and targets improved performance rather than increased diversity as the desired outcome.

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[Appendix follows]

Appendix

Participant Interview Protocol

The subject of this study is diversity management.

1. Let's begin with your background. Specifically, how and why did you become a manager? (What skills, talents, or traits qualify you for that role?)
2. I define diversity management as a management discipline, practice designed to get the best from all employees recognizing the uniqueness of each person. What is your definition of diversity management and how did you arrive at that perspective?
3. As a manager of a diverse team of people, what have been some of your biggest challenges? What have been some of your best times?
4. In your experience, has the increase in diversity been a positive, negative, or neutral factor in achieving consistent business results? Why?
5. Think back to your own experience as an individual contributor. When you were at your best, what did your manager do to make it possible for you to thrive and succeed?
6. Now think about a typical day, week, and month as a manager of a diverse team. What kinds of situations tend come up and how do you handle them?
7. Given your responsibility to produce results for the company, if you had a choice between a more homogeneous team (e.g., all engineers from the same school and similar work experience) and a more diverse team (demographic, psychographic, function, worldview, etc.), which would you prefer? Why?
8. When your company introduced the idea of managing diversity, were you onboard immediately; did you grow to appreciate it later; were you then and are you now skeptical of the idea? Why?
9. What are the tools, techniques, models, instruments, and styles, which have contributed to your success as a manager of a diverse team? What made these tools effective?
10. Finally, if your favorite niece became a manager of a diverse team, what would you tell her to make sure she was successful? Elaborate.

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