

UNDERSTANDING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY: IN THEOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *Diversity is a societal reality and an important phenomenon for researchers and scholars with emergence of globalization. With increasing differences in population, heterogeneity is increasing in workforce. In this regard current study has looked at the issue of diversity with the lens of Islam. Thus current study has examined core Islamic text and its explanation for the issue of diversity. Religion is still a guideline for large number of people who turn to sacred text to guide them on various issues of life. Thus as per Islamic teachings diversity appear to be an inevitable phenomenon carrying more of a benefit for mankind. Diversity with relevance to social categorization theory and dealing with diversified workforce (Monotheistic religion and pantheistic religion) has been studied.*

Keywords: Diversity, Religion, Minor Groups, Social categorization Theory

INTRODUCTION

Organizations have three important characteristics i.e. purpose, deliberate structure and people. An entity is considered as organization once these three characteristics are available in it [1]. Out of these characteristics only people are living organisms who define the purpose and structure for their organization. However people working within organization may also differ in attributes. Those attributes could be visible as sex, race or age, or invisible and mutable as status, expertise or style [2]. Hence differences (visible or non-visible) among employees at workplace are considered to be diversity. Researchers emphasized that with the emergence of globalization, diversity within organizations is increasing [3]. Globalization is giving chance to people from diversified origins to come and work together. Further with changing roles of women and minorities in society, workplaces are becoming more diverse. Pew Research Centre found in their research that millennial generation is much diverse than the earlier generation [4]. Hence organizations are putting effort to manage the increasing diversity. Diversity is considered as double edged sword and managers are trying to benefit from the functional side of it [5].

However there is a dysfunctional side of diversity also which reduces performance, enhances conflict and reduces communication [6]. Thus it is important for managers to manage the diversity at workplace. Else large number of employees from minor groups fails to achieve the targets of their lives [7]. Secular and non-secular directions are introduced to literature which may work as guideline for managers to manage diversity [8, 9].

Taking a non-secular view of diversity; mankind is considered to be the off springs of Prophet Adam and Adam is considered to be the first man as per Islam, Christianity and Judaism [10]. In all three major monotheist religions Adam is considered to be the father of the human race. Adam is the word used for man in the Hebrew language which is the language of Holy Scripture of Judaism i.e. Torah [11]. It is further elaborates that word *Adamah* is also used for dust in Hebrew language reflecting the concept of humanity made from dust or ground [12]. Christianity also considers Adam as predecessor of the mankind who may be considered as the first man [13]. Similarly in Islam Adam is considered to be the first Prophet and the first being created by the Almighty.

He is also considered as father to the family of mankind [14]. From the view of three major religions the origin of mankind was homogenous however over time heterogeneity and diversity increased among the mankind.

Multinational corporations and globalization has encouraged the diversity at workplace hence this phenomenon is catching attention of researchers and practitioners [15]. Critically it is important to find the nature of diversity. Whether it is beneficial for the organization or not. One pole of researchers considers diversity valuable for organization [16]. Their value in diversity hypothesis claims that if diversity is managed positively it can bring value to the organization. However on the other hand another group of researchers consider diversity is deleterious in nature [17]. However diversity is considered to be a double edged sword which may bring creativity at the work floor and on the other hand it may raise the chance for the conflicts [18].

Secular and non-secular schools of thought have addressed the issue of diversity at workplace. Similar attempts have been made by theologians to guide managers and practitioners regarding diversity [19]. Because diversity if not managed or understood properly becomes the reason of conflicts at workplace [20]. On similar note religion and faith still prescribe behavior of its followers outside worshipping place. Religion helps to guide large number of people who are associated with particular faith [21]. Thus current study analyzes the issue of diversity and specifically workforce diversity with the lens of Islam. Islam standing as a popular religion and a living philosophy would be studied in current paper to see how Islam guides and directs managers to deal with the issue of diversity at workplace and among the workforce.

Research Gap

Faith and religion is still a popular guideline for large number of people in the world [21]. With the emergence of Islamic Management various managerial issues are examined under the guidelines of Islam. Diversity and its nature from the Islamic perspective are yet to be explored. Investigation of word diversity with human beings and mankind is yet to be conducted which may further be used by human resource practitioners and managers. Thus current paper would examine core Islamic text and its explanation for the issue of diversity.

Significance

Current paper would be significant for managers working in culture aligned with Islamic values. This study can also be further used by managers operating with Muslim workforce. Research would also guide scholars and practitioners of Islamic Management to understand the role of diversity and how diversity would be managed at workplace with the guidance of Quran.

Research Objectives

To explain the concept of diversity at workplace from Islamic context

World view

Diversity is defined as “the condition of being different” [22]. Hankin further elaborates that in context of workforce diversity is defined as the differences among employees. Daft adds that workforce is considered to be diverse when employees come from different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicity and religion [23]. However there are many attributes which could differentiate one group from another and can make workforce more diverse. Daft highlighted primary and secondary dimensions of diversity by calling primary dimensions as those attributes which include inborn differences i.e. age, gender etc. However secondary dimensions can be learnt and changed over the period of life e.g. education, work style, communication etc. Mazur even mentioned tertiary dimensions of diversity e.g. feelings, attitudes etc. [9]. Daft explained that myriads of patterns can appear by changing the combination of primary, secondary and tertiary traits making workforce more diverse and complex [23].

However as per researchers diversity is a double edged sword [5]. Thus it has benefits which may come with consequences of conflicts and dissatisfaction. Thus the literature on the topic of diversity that it is functional or dysfunctional keeps on swinging. Scholars consider that diversity bring creativity and thoughts from different minds to the workforce. Hence diversity fosters innovation and creativity at the work floor [24]. On the other hand scholars highlight the dysfunctional results if diversity at the work floor due to conflicts, stereotyping resulting in turnover [25]. Contradictory results appear due to use of various underpinning theories used by researchers. Williams & O’Reilly highlighted three major underlying theories used in literature for diversity i.e. social categorization, similarity/attraction and informational diversity [15].

Islamic View

Apart from the world view an Islamic view is to be explored in current study that how Quran and *Hadith* guides practitioners and scholars of human resource management and organizational behavior.

Origin & Diversity

Regarding the origin of mankind Quran guides that all mankind is created from one soul [26], this has been discussed by Muslim theologian as the unity of Human origin [27]. However in same verse [26] Quran further guides that the origin was further separated in couples who gave birth to many men and women who spread across the earth. This reflects that diversity as per gender and demography is in nature of mankind as per Islamic teachings. As the Arabic word used in verse is *Nafs* (a soul) *Wahida* (single). However

Arabic word *Zojaha* (couple) is used to reveal diversity. Hence, revealing a single origin of mankind spreading into diversified population. This has been addressed in Al-Quran that all form of existences is in pair [28]. Celebrating the diversity of gender and considering it essential.

Nature of Diversity

Quran further explains the nature of diversity as inevitable phenomenon in lives of human beings. This finding is guided by following verse “*And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ*” [29]. Hence diversity lies in very essence of mankind. Thus in context of Islamic Management diversity may be dealt as a factor which is inevitable and will always appear in course of organizational life. Similar findings have already been shared by Herbert Spencer who concluded that universe is moving from homogeneity to heterogeneity. From living organisms to matter, societies to laws everything of the universe is diversifying from its origin [30]. Hence as per Islamic scripture diversity is inevitable which can further be understood by the verse “*And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge*” [31]. Thus Quran further quotes that diversity is one of the signs of the Almighty. But which could only be understood by those having knowledge. Thus diversity will be better understood by people having knowledge or the one who ponders on the universe. In consequence it is very important to advance in the field of knowledge so diversity could be appreciated.

Criteria for Evaluating Diversity

Evaluation As earlier highlighted as per Islamic philosophy diversity is functional in nature or somehow inevitable. Thus a manager or researcher should be ready to receive issues related with diversity as diversity highlights the sign of Allah [31]. But among the diversified workforce what criteria a manager should choose to assess or evaluate the employees. Quran guides managers while dealing with diversified workforce as: *To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ* [32]. Thus no variable of diversity e.g. demographic, gender, age, creed, caste would be significant to assess an employee’s performance or to evaluate an employee at the workplace. The only important factor would be *race to good* or as called as *deeds*. In organizational context the factor to test people is how they abide to the rules of the workplace (*to test you in what He has given you*) and who adds more benefit to the system.

Religious Diversity- with Monotheistic Religions

Apart from three major monotheistic religions there are large numbers of religions in the world. Similarly various organized groups are also available [33]. Numbers reflect that the world has high level of religious diversity. Quran guides for both the people of the scripture (Judaism and Christianity) and other minor groups who believe in various deities. Quran directs for people of the scripture as “*And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except*

for those who commit injustice among them, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him." [34]. Word Muslim is used for being who submit his/her will to the Almighty. Judaism, Christianity and Islam share common idea of God i.e. Almighty. Thus Quran guides followers of Islam not to create baseless conflicts with people of scripture. Conflict may only be considered when injustice is practiced by any of the party. Quran witnesses about the divine books which were revealed to earlier Prophets thus demanding Muslims to focus on harmony. This has further been associated with another verse of Quran which points Muslim to act good with Jews and Christians who believe in one God, day of resurrection and perform virtuous acts [35]. Islam values pluralism, pluralism not only by living with people of different faith but actively engaging with them [36].

Religious Diversity- with Pantheistic Religions

Furthermore there are other minor religions also or other organized groups representing religion. Quran has clearly dictated its followers that don't say wrong to their false God as they may speak against the absolute Almighty of yours, hence further guided "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion" [37]. This verse can be guideline for dealing with other religious groups at the workplace. One may respect their religion and give them full liberty to exercise their religion.

Diversity and Minor Groups

Similarly minorities struggle to find equal space even in modern and enlighten workplace. Recent report suggested that minorities struggle to meet the expectations for their career [7]. Names are ridiculed and people are chosen or filtered on the basis of their names [4]. However Quran guides in Chapter Rooms "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers". Verse clearly state that it is strictly now allowed as per Islamic teachings to ridicule others with nicknames. Groups, people and individuals may only be called with their real names. Hence on visible attributes or being majority one cannot declare to be better or righteous. Therefore others cannot be ridiculed as it stands against the social harmony of the system. Further verse guides regarding invisible or deep level diversity that people should not make claims about others hearts. Individuals are unaware of intentions of others. Hence claims should not be made regarding the deep level diversity. Saying of Prophet (PBUH) "Actions are by intentions" [38] further elaborate this point that only Almighty know about intentions of mankind and beings can only observe the actions.

Diversity, Quran & Social Categorization Theory

Similarly modern researchers refer social categorization theory as base theory of diversity [15]. Self-categorization theory explains that individuals identify themselves in social

categories which add to the positive image of their self [39, 40]. Thus individuals will belong to groups for better recognition and identity in society. Work of Messick and Mackie earlier noted that general social categories e.g. age & gender had been used in earlier times by the primitive man for the process of self-categorization [41]. Research has looked into bright and dark sides of social categorization. Darker side highlights polarization, anxiety and decreases in satisfaction of the work group. On the issue of diversity in context of social categorization theory, Quran i.e. Islamic Holy scripture explains as "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" [42]. Here Quran also highlights the role of diversity in terms of social categorization theory that diversity exists among the mankind so they can categorize themselves and know one another among those categories. Thus for Islam the idea of diversity leads to social categorization to provide meaning to the self. Hence it brings more of meaningfulness rather than a state alienation.

CONCLUSION

Scientific research has a particular view towards the concept of diversity which is divided till today that diversity is beneficial in nature or not. Similarly myriads of papers shed light on how to manage diversity to use the functional side of it. However vast majority of world still considers religion as the guiding tool in various openings of life. Diversity is no exception in this regard. Current paper looked into very essence of diversity and how it is discussed in core Islamic text i.e. Quran. Quran considers a unique origination of mankind from single soul (*Nafse Wahida*). Earlier quoted in introduction in Islam (and also in Judaism and Christianity) Adam is considered as the father of human race. Thus there was a unique single origination of mankind. But with the advancement, Quran highlights that diversity is in very nature of universe. Mankind would continue to be divergent in surface level and deep level attributes. Quran acknowledges diversity of language and color but while evaluating people no attribute can be the reason but only deeds and actions. Similarly Quran cherishes pluralism with monotheistic religions and pantheistic believers of different religions. By following justice and agreeing to the common terms. Similarly explanation of diversity through self-categorization theory and elucidation from Quran/ Islamic perspective has also been included for future insight. Thus as per Islamic view diversity is inevitable and essential for the growth of society. Though having diverse beings available in society only deeds, actions and merit should be used for evaluation.

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