Workplace Diversity

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About the Tutorial

Workplace Diversity is the acceptance of the fact that every individual is unique, and respecting that their uniqueness could be because of their race, gender, age, class, and physical ability, and religious inclination. It is also the recognition that these unique people have many common characteristics that help them in collaborating with others while performing a common task.

The objective of this tutorial is to introduce our readers to the concept of Workplace Diversity and to create an awareness about diversity management. This tutorial also gives an insight into how large organizations implement workplace diversity and gain success and recognition from that.

Audience

This tutorial is designed primarily for those professionals, who are getting the opportunity to work in a diverse workplace and need assistance in understanding the approach they are supposed to have.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are expected to have a calm mindset and be open to exploring the suggestions mentioned here.

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Workplace Diversity – An Introduction

Abraham Lincoln said, "United we stand, divided we fall." Often lauded as the Great Emancipator, Lincoln strongly believed in the idea of a united nation where people from all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and religions could work together in taking the nation forward. In other words, he believed in the possibility of existence for a diverse society.

But what exactly is diversity? Is it just the race and cultural background of a person? Or is it only a type of personality? For something that's quite the hot thing at the moment, with every major company training its employees on it and politicians mentioning it increasingly, very few people seem to really understand the meaning of it. So let's understand what it really means and stands for.

Workplace Diversity is the acceptance of the fact that every individual is unique, and respecting that their uniqueness could be because of their race, gender, age, class, and physical ability, sexual orientation, and religious inclination.

It is also the recognition that these unique people have many common characteristics that helps them in collaborating with others while performing in a common task. That provides them an opportunity to bring together their unique set of abilities to the table, which helps in getting different approaches to a situation.

Defining Workplace Diversity

Successful organizations that stress on having a diverse working environment have proved that people learn to channel their differences to make it their strength when they are given a common task. This phenomenon is different from assimilation, where people change their lifestyles to adopt the lifestyles of those they work with.

In case of diversity, people will still retain their individual values and mutual respect of one another as unique people, even if they are working as a team on a common task by combining their skills, experiences, and ideas. In a way, diversity is all about difference. The manner in which you analyze and use these differences will determine if diversity is an asset or liability to you and your organization.

Many organizations have now started providing training on diversity to their employees, however, diversity is not really a craft or a skill that you can acquire through training. If a person doesn't have a broad mentality, he would always notice the differences between people, which will affect the way he handles relationships at his workplace.

However, he would do good to realize that the world is growing smaller in this age of globalization, and adjusting to different working environments is fast becoming a part of our jobs, and not just a personality trait. The key to understanding diversity is to have an open and honest communication, which helps people in understanding one another and building a feeling of mutual respect and trust in the workplace.

2. IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Practicing diversity has certainly made the workplace a much more interesting, dynamic and exciting place. When different people from different backgrounds start working together, they can all exchange information, traditions and experiences with each other. This makes the workforce a much more balanced and tolerant place to work in.

The fun comes with a trade-off, though. It has also made professional life more challenging, unpredictable, and complicated. While in a homogenous working environment, one can easily mention something in a lighter vein, the same joke could turn out to be highly insulting to people in a diverse working place.

Lawsuits have been filed over off-handed remarks by managers in the presence of co-workers who found the manager's sayings offensive. People working in diverse teams have to be more cautious than ever of not hurting anyone's sentiments through their words, actions, or behaviors.

Many of those in diverse teams have stated their discomfort in making comments and sharing their thoughts openly because they are unsure of, what may offend their co-workers. They say that it's difficult to know what the right thing to say anymore, because discussing things that were embedded into their subconscious minds for years since childhood are now suddenly taboo.

This is where the underlying working principle behind diversity – it needs to be understood. Diversity requires respecting one's own beliefs while learning the skills of dealing appropriately with beliefs and values that may be totally different.

When we put people of different color, gender, and ethnicities into one workplace, we get the advantage of the many different ways of thinking these people bring with them. Many of these factors may not have an immediate noticeable impact, however diverse groups bring a lot of variety through their personality, thought process, processing information, assertiveness, values, energy levels, education levels, experience, goals, political views, lifestyle, and social status, among many others.

Diversity is much more than skin color, gender, or background. It's internal and external. Skin color is a byproduct of pigmentation, and doesn't determine how we think, feel, or believe. Similarly, we had no choice of our gender, which is a random gene-based selection process. Things like skin color and gender should not dictate our goals, ambitions, or careers.

As children, we learn about morals, values, and religious beliefs from our parents, teachers and surroundings. These learnings that we receive at an early stage of our lives lay the foundation for our personalities. Depending on the kind of upbringing we receive, we develop a thought-process.

However, we relearn and adjust our values and morals over the course of our lives. Each of us is diverse in many ways and bring many qualities to the workforce and the world in general. The key to succeed in such a world is to learn the art of having a level-headed

conversation on tough topics, while respecting other's sensibilities and values at the same time.

Having a diverse workforce will lead to having associates and managers who are people from various languages, cultures, values, and beliefs. Today's workplaces are highly heterogeneous and this has brought about many changes in the traditional ways of doing business

Now, we find companies doing their best to get their methods of functioning scrutinized and restructured on a daily basis so that their workforce can be more inclusive and composite in nature. When different people bring different views to the table, there are possibilities of discussions off-shooting to a potential business opportunity.

Mastering and applying Diversity in Workplace will help professionals and managers understand a diverse workforce better, so that they can attract new talent and retain productive employees in a today's competitive global economy.

This also helps managers to create a dynamic and complete work environment where all employees are respected and treated with dignity. It ensures that every person's commitment to the company is maximized by making him feel as if he belongs in this place.

We have presented a few scenarios below related to workplace diversity. Go through the scenarios and mention how the following scenarios make you view workplace diversity as.

- After interviewing a few aspirants to fill a direct support position, one HR remarked in front of his colleague, "Let's go for this guy; Asians are hard workers and really practical."

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- Salma clearly mentioned it to her supervisor, Kim that her religion prevents her from performing CPR on someone, if such emergency rose and would also not want someone to perform it on her. Although Kim understood the gravity of the matter and see Salma's conviction in this matter, she was required to have one CPR-certified staff member on duty at all times, as per policy. Kim was at a loss of ideas on how to handle the situation.

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- Beth is a manager at an old people's home. She manages a multi-cultural staff. Beth believes that the best way in which she can respect all her staff members is by treating them as same. Her logic was that this would minimize the potential conflicts between the staff members. However, she could sense some tension and friction in the mind of one of the staff member, Shamaa.

  When asked, Shamaa told that, her culture prohibits men and women to interact closely, however Beth has assigned her the responsibility of assisting some male residents with their personal hygiene.

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- The company that Issac works for hosts a Christmas Party every year. Joseph expressed his concern to his supervisor that there are staff members like him who don't celebrate Christmas. His supervisor told Issac that, he is being overly sensitive and the celebration isn't religious is nature. Having said that, the supervisor did change the name of the event from "Annual Christmas Party" to "Annual Holiday Party", but everything else has remained the same, including the Santa Claus.

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- Hadi was having a discussion with his supervisor at the restaurant he worked in, when he told him that he would start fasting during daylight hours starting from the next day for the entire month, as it was the month of Ramadan. His supervisor found this interesting and asked Hadi more about his religious beliefs. The next day, Hadi found out that he has been assigned the job duty of preparing all the meals for the day.

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- Sissy was attending to a new customer who had stopped in front of her counter at the jewelry store. Without making any assumptions, Sissy asked the customer about her heritage and learnt that the customer's family had immigrated to the United States many generations ago.

  Sissy also found it interesting that the customer said she was proud of her culture and still celebrates some of the important holidays of her culture, however, she and her family speak only English at home and have adopted many practices of their new country.

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4. IDENTIFYING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Diversity in workplace is not just related to color and race. Even people of the same race and color can be diverse in the way they process what they listen, see, think, and accept information about. It is a subconscious and automatic process.

Nowadays, many trainers start their training programs with an initial study of the kind of learners they have in their training room. If they have a predominantly visual learner base, they try to use more graphics and diagrams. For auditory, they will rely on audio files and listening techniques, and for kinesthetic-oriented learners, they organize one-on-one discussions, forums, and jam sessions.

We can identify three major categories of processing styles: Visual Learners, Auditory Learners, and Kinesthetic Learners.

Visual Learners

These prefer to receive information visually. They like to get information in written form. A visual person would like to read an email or see a fax of something before taking any decision, no matter how articulately you explain things to him. They will tend to use sentences that will have a lot of visual words like "I don't see a lot of profit here", "Look, I wanted things to be this way", "Did you see what he said?" etc. They enjoy reading, watching TV, writing stuff and playing intellectual games.

Auditory Learners

Auditory Learners like to ask for information in speech. Instead of reading a book, they would like to listen to audio book where the lines will be narrated to them. If you send them even a brief mail, they would most likely respond somewhat like "Yeah, I got the mail, however couldn't get the time to go through it. Could we talk about it now?"

Auditory Learners use auditory sentences like "I don't like the sound of that.", "The plan sounds great." They like listening and humming, sometimes unconsciously, and love listening to music. They enjoy word games and having conversations.

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic Learners would want to meet you in person before taking any decision. They would use words that are predominantly related to touch, feel and presence. Their sentences would sound like "This is a touchy issue.", "This doesn't feel right"

They like to hold things while talking. Even if they are complimenting the color of your dress, they might reach out and touch your dress. They enjoy sports and dancing.

People do cross over from one style to another but researchers say that, we stay in our own comfort zone 70% of the times. So identifying and adapting to someone's primary style can help you break the ice quicker with them and build a rapport.

Overall, understanding diversity is about feeling comfortable in an interrelated society and providing optimal output in an interdependent workplace that is a representation of the different demographics of the world.

5. LEARNING DIVERSITY – WORKSHEET

When working with a diverse team, it's important to know the learning preferences of each one of them. Communicating with them in a manner they like to receive information could not only make them more responsive but also productive.

This worksheet is designed to give a clear indication of a person's learning preference. Answer the questions to the best of your ability.

S.No.	Statements	YES	NO
1.	I prefer watching a video to reading.		
2.	When I sing, I know the words to the songs		
3.	I have athletic ability.		
4.	I can picture the setting of a story I am reading.		
5.	I study better with music in the background.		
6.	I enjoy hands-on learning.		
7.	I'd rather play sports than watch someone play them.		
8.	Reading aloud helps me remember.		
9.	I prefer watching someone perform a task before I do.		
10.	I color-coordinate my clothes.		
11.	I'm good at rhyming and rapping.		
12.	Use phrases like: "I'm up against the wall,"		
13.	I look at something many times before I understand it.		
14.	I prefer receiving oral directions than written ones.		
15.	I have difficulty being still for long periods of time.		
16.	I use phrases like "That looks good."		
17.	I'm good at figuring out how something works.		
18.	I can understand a taped lecture.		

Questions that are visual in nature	1, 4, 9, 10, 13, 16
Questions that are auditory in nature	2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18
Questions that are kinesthetic in nature	3, 6, 7, 12, 15, 17

Compare all your "Yes" responses with the chart given above. Depending on the type of learning that question fits into, write the corresponding question number under suitable headings in the table.

Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic
Total	Total	Total

The box with the maximum number of question numbers will determine your dominant learning style. If someone doesn't find a clear dominant style emerging, there's nothing to be worried about. He could be a versatile individual!

Ford Motors is an esteemed automobile manufacturer that provides great value to their customers without altering their product strategy as per the country they operate in. The company holds 100 manufacturing plants in the United States, Brazil, Thailand, South Africa, and many more. It provides employment to more than 350,000 people globally.

Ford's key business blueprint whirls around workplace diversity and entry in every level of the company's operations. Their diversity can be noticed right from the boardroom, to plant floors to the engineering center. They specifically mention that, it is their diversity that makes them a better and outstanding company.

The information we are going to share, about Ford Motors company is mentioned in many online sources that are available to the public. All the information was collected from the company's website. The aim for collecting this information, is to get insights into company's workplace diversity involvement.

Ford Motors – History of Diversity

In the early days, Ford Motor company took the required steps to assure that its workforce has mirrored the communities in which it does business. Within its first five years, Ford had based production or sales operations in the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, portions of Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and in Russia.

The CEO of the company, Henry Ford, in 1913, embraced a strategy, which greatly helped the company to meet its customer requirements. Through this strategy, the positions of some of the workers were modified and tempting wages and salaries were offered which were more than double the industry average at that time.

The 5 dollars a day tempted thousands of immigrants and African Americans to join the company. Ford effectively assembled a new American middle class car which made Ford Motor company, one of the first American companies to mirror the growing diversity of the United States.

Noticing the company's day-by-day grow in diversity, Ford realized that it requires to strategically and effectively cope up with the diverse workforce to enable its execution strategy to work for company's advantage. Thus, Ford perceived some measures, which they thought would preserve and also allure new diverse workforce rules and successfully does diversity execution and management. These measures included Ford Motors´ recognition as its global diversity vision of "Diversity and Inclusion", of which some strategies are highlighted and explained below:

- **Global Diversity Vision at Ford** – The vision of diversity and inclusion of Ford is to preserve diversity and inclusion environment. In order for Ford Motors to acquire its vision and strategy, it identified 5 strategic focuses that engages: (Strategic Areas of Focus, 2013)

- **Diverse Workforce** – Employing people from all over the world regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability to devote to the company's success story.

- **Respectful and Inclusive Work Environment –** A working environment where no one is left out rather everyone is involved in the decision-making process as well as opinion sharing. Mutual respect for every individual's cultural beliefs and personality is seen and believed.

- **Leading the Way –** To assure that Ford Motors stands "on top of the chart" above other esteemed companies, by moving one step ahead from them as a whole in terms of workplace diversity and productivity.

- **Work life Integration –** This integration includes workers making choices as well as exercising control of their life´s dares in order to meet their goals. In noticing the impact of the work life integration strategy, the company traced a conducive-working environment for workers to successfully combine personal lives with their working life, henceforth encouraging them to work productively, effectively and efficiently.

- **External Partnerships –** Ford Motors constructed partnership sales group, which targets at giving large discounts to employees, retirees and spouses of eligible partner companies to oblige as goodwill and a means to avail workplace diversity.

Global Diversity Challenges at Ford

Ford Motors had confronted numerous challenges and has since continued to progress on their strategies to manage these challenges in order to continue with their story regarding workplace diversity. Given below are some of the challenges:

- **Assembling a Structure and Guideline for Different Religious groups** – One of the challenges that Ford motors confronted was the ability to effectively form a structure and the best guideline that all workers from different religious backgrounds could adapt, and could accept and follow irrespective of their belief. It took some time to overcome, as the workers too were unable to understand how to work with their own faith and support others with different faith at the same time.

- **Developing Solutions and New Strategies** – One of the major challenges at ford is to constantly develop new diversity solutions and strategies to manage workplace diversity, as well as discover new and effective methods of doing things.

- **To be Fair to all –** Ford Motors has been making a brilliant effort to battle the challenge of being open and fair to all workers, by generating equal opportunity for all employees to render their full potentials in the various roles they play.

- **Effective Diversity Education** – To effectively educate workers on diversity and it practicalities have been one of the challenges at ford as the company contends to assure successful diversity execution.

Diversity Management Tools at Ford

To successfully manage a diverse workforce as well as continue to sponsor its diversity initiative, Ford Motors formed various meetings and outreach groups that targets to educate and serve as a tool to address diversity challenges as well as assist employees

through the day-to-day activities both at work and their personal lives. To mention but a few, some of the groups are briefed as follows:

- **Disabled Employees (FEDA**) – FEDA aims to assure that, disabled employees enjoy flexible and comfortable working environment by facilitating them the required resources and networking tools.

- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) –** This group is a collaborative corporate-sponsored employee resource group. It renders support network and adds to employee's professional development.

- **Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender Employees (GLOBE) –** The group firmly supports the company's Equal Employment Opportunity policy. It renders networking and supports employee's freedom of choice.

- **The employees African-Ancestry Network (FAAN) –** The group was formed since 1994 to avail leadership and development with the help of counseling and dialogues on diversity with high level management. It also establishes seminars and mentoring programs for employees.

- **Asian Indian Association (FAIA) –** The group targets on grooming the competencies of employees to help them become strong leaders. It also patterns a community and corporate citizenship outreach, as well as sponsor Ford brand.

- **The Interfaith Network (FIN)** – FIN aims to avail religious tolerance and understanding, peace and decency of all humans. The group brings together employees of all religious backgrounds to intend their belief in a meaningful and appropriate way.

7. DISADVANTAGES OF WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

While the final results of a properly-run diverse workforce might turn out great, it's the period of implementation of the program that is the most trying for any organization. It has been observed that the first steps of implementation provide the biggest hurdle for any management, and the hurdles stem from the insecurity and pre-conceived notions that the employees have in their minds. Workplace Diversity is not a study of some empirical data. Instead, it is about understanding and accepting diversity.

Many organizations operate on the concept of "color-blindness", which is treating all people equally irrespective of their skin color. While the intentions might to be to encourage equality among employees, issues generally crop up. That's because the one who implements the steps to ensure equality still isn't aware of the other cultures, and without that knowledge, it would be difficult to understand equality. In addition to that, the initial cost of the mandatory training provided to each employee on how to manage Workplace Diversity is very high. This training extends to the supervisors and managers, and at time, clients. The programs involve a lot of traveling and investing productive hours.

The other major issue of implementing diversification in the workplace is that, it invites discrimination from both managers and employees. Many employees find it hard to work with a manager who is from a different background.
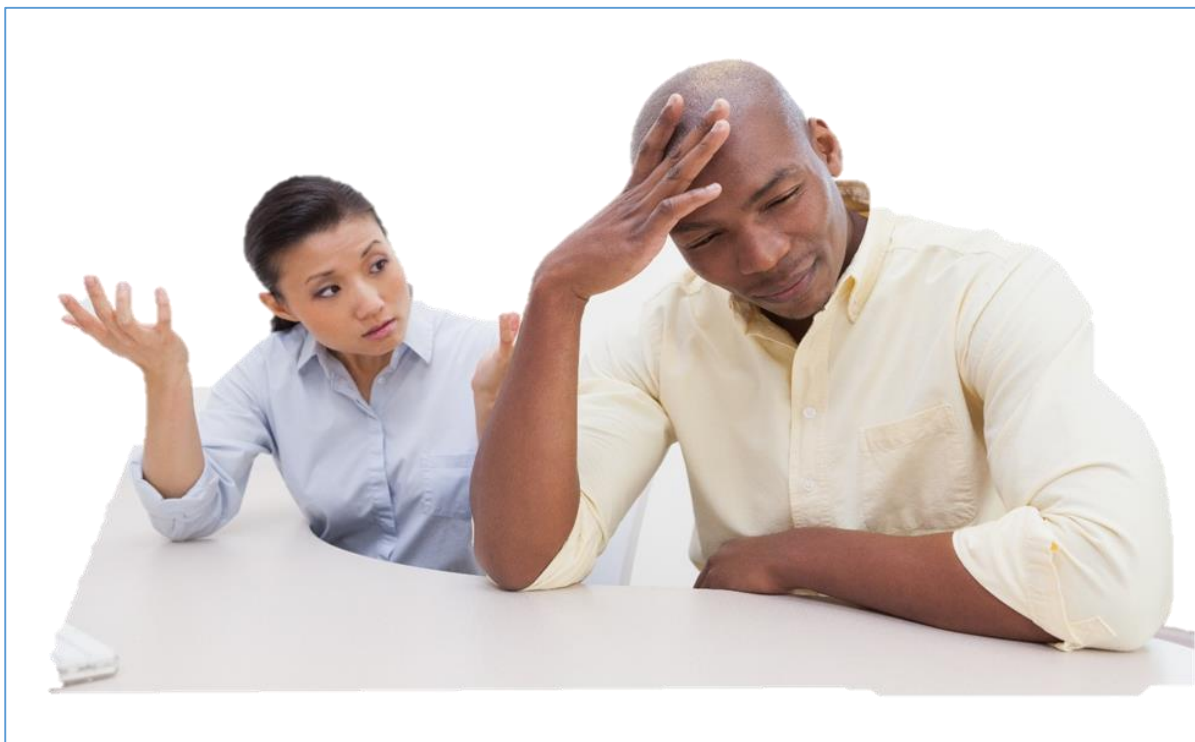
Cases of managers discriminating against people from what they perceive are inferior backgrounds are well-known as well. These cases of discrimination might not be pronounced but it can exist in a hidden manner. When a worker is discriminated, it directly impacts his productivity. In extreme case, it invites litigation.

Challenges in Diversity

When diverse people start to work together, it has been observed that they face initial hiccups in communicating with each other. That's natural when you consider that all of them are from different backgrounds but this initial lag in communication decreases productivity in the workplace and causes a lot of issues in team-meetings.

In addition to the issues discusses above, there is always a culture clash in the beginning of the training. While cultivating a mutual respect for one another's culture is the main idea behind implementing workplace diversity, it could be a huge task to accommodate every diverse employee's request based on cultural and religious beliefs.

There have been cases where companies had no other choice but to hire other full-time staff to keep a track of their diverse employee's preferences and needs. These cases happen in large organizations with very diverse workplaces. For example, many Muslim employees decide to not work on Fridays, as it is a special day for prayers in their religion. To accommodate this request of theirs, the company now has to hire additional staff who would work on their behalf.

Implementing the Change

The purpose of implementing workplace diversity is getting employees together to see the big picture and contribute to achieving it through their different ideas. However, it has been seen that instead of bringing employees together, it actually polarizes them into factions and groups.

Although these groups are all informal, however it actually prevents employees from interacting with people beyond their culture. The old saying of "birds with same feathers flock together" will be perfect to describe this case. Employees don't meet, socialize or spend leisure time with one another. Although this isn't fundamentally wrong in itself, it can put limitations on employees knowing about other employees which reduces effective communication skills, hence decreasing productivity.

8. WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is a process where organizations take their businesses to an international stage. In today's world, companies are more interested to operate on a global scale as they find that, there is demand for their products. There is also another reason behind this phenomenon. The prices of raw materials also vary all over the world. Different countries offer different tax breaks to companies too. Keeping all these factors in mind, companies find it a very profitable venture to open their offices in different parts of the world.

This creates an interesting situation. While getting more inexpensive raw material and tax breaks is fine, a company soon realizes that it's impractical to send its entire workforce from their home-state to another country. The logistics just won't add up. So, what they do is, they tap into the abundant local labor in that country which works both ways. It reduces the upfront capital of the company, as well as provides employment opportunities to the locals. However, to get people work together so that there is one common output, the company has to send supervisors who can instruct the indigenous people on the specifications and designs. This creates a diverse workplace by default.

In today's world, talent shortage is a huge issue when every other company is offering extremely competitive wages. Organizations now know that, they have to attract, motivate and retain their talent force. Increasing diversity in the workplace not only increase turn-over but also reduces absenteeism.

Globalization has also brought in a wave of increased product awareness and consumer need. Companies now know that their products can have an appreciable market demand in a country that's far away from the place they are located in. They understand that they have to employ people from various backgrounds so that they can connect better with different markets that they are familiar with, and increase the business potential of the company.

Change is the only constant, however when it comes to accepting this fact, many people find it difficult. Many employees don't want to accept the change in their workplace that diversity brings with it. Employees fear the competition that highly motivated people from different backgrounds, social status and economic fronts bring with them to the workplace.

Working women face a different challenge. Even in today's world, women are expected to be the primary parent when it comes to attending to their children. The way they juggle their parental responsibilities with their work often creates friction in their family lives.

In many cases, it was found that the diverse person himself wasn't comfortable working in an organization that was predominantly of one race or culture. The fear in his mind stems from discrimination and possible retaliation.

When these issues crop up, as they do, the management needs to take a tough stand and send a clear message to their staff that the change is bound to happen and that's the way to a better future. This message should come firm and with conviction. The staff should understand that the management is serious about diversity and they will do well to follow suit.

In addition to sending a strong message, the management can successfully implement Workforce Diversity by following these steps:

- **Establish Urgency** – the management must provide convincing argument on the need to embrace diversity, and that the employees shouldn't be viewing this change as a policy makeover, but rather as a change in ideology.

- **Form a Winning Team** – The heads of the departments need to get together on this and throw their entire support behind the move. This will encourage the employees to see the right picture. People tend to follow their managers as they have more experience and are the right people to get information from.

- **Define Clear Vision and Strategy** – Outlining a clear strategy and empowering people with a vison gets them motivated and engaged in a result-oriented process. This helps the company keep a track of its employees' involvement and successful implementation of the project. Small-term targets must be set to ensure its successful implementation.

Diversity Strategies Comparison Chart

In the following Comparison Chart, we have tried to explain in a nutshell, the prominent differences between the Implementation Strategies of big companies and small companies. We will discuss the reasons behind this difference in the next table:

Big Companies	Small Companies
They have specific Employee Resource groups to provide mentoring programs to their employees	Human Resource personnel and managers take the responsibility to guide employees.
The companies provide an equal working opportunities and access to information to all their employees.	They contact those candidates who they think will be the perfect fit as per their desired profile.
The companies employ people with disabilities and provide them a healthy and safe working place.	The companies don't employ people with disabilities as they don't feel sufficient in dealing with the challenges that come with it.
The companies provide employees with dedicated libraries where they can study more about diversity and learn how to implement them.	Managers tackle diversity-related issues only when they face some, otherwise there is no extensive training given on it.
The companies intensively invest time and money in training their employees on Workplace Diversity.	They don't spend money on training, but raise awareness through occasional seminars.

There are several significant reasons behind big companies having different approach towards Workplace Diversity as compared to small companies. We have compiled the most important of these differences in the table below:

Big Companies	Small Companies
The companies have Operation Plants in many countries in the world.	The companies many operate in only their native country or 3-4 countries.
The Companies employ indigenous workers wherever they establish their workplace.	Their recruitment is limited to one to three countries.
Their workforce Diversity covers addresses all cases of diversity due to the nature of their operations.	They consider mostly physical ability, gender, geographical location when recruiting their employees.
Generally, these companies employ over 4,00,000 people in more than 210 countries	Employ lesser employees and from lesser regions.
They encounter numerous challenges too, due to the size and diversity of their company.	Their challenges are seldom and minimal, due to their small size and limited scope of operation.