

Workforce Diversity in Organizations: A Systematic Review with an Emphasis on Iranian Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Workforce diversity is an essential phenomenon in organizations. Statistics indicate a growing diversity among the workforce in Iran, particularly in terms of ethnic diversity. This study aims to examine work diversity through systematic review with an emphasis on Iranian Organizations.

Methodology: This study employs the PRISMA method to review articles published on the management of diversity in organizations. Of the 140 identified Iranian and international articles, 59 relevant articles were selected. Most articles focus on gender diversity, and other causes of diversity, especially ethnic diversity, have received limited critical studies. Additionally, only a few articles address diversity management and its strategies in organizations, which represents a research gap.

Findings: The research findings explored workforce diversity in four categories: the importance of diversity management; diversity management and communication; diversity management and organizational justice; diversity management and workforce productivity.

Conclusion: The literature review demonstrated that workforce diversity is considered inevitable not only due to its positive organizational outcomes but also because of legal and ethical requirements in our contemporary world. Furthermore, it can be argued that the performance of diversity management at the organizational level has been overlooked. Notably, most researchers in the United States and Western European countries adopt quantitative approaches, highlighting the significance of qualitative approaches.

Keywords: *diversity management, workforce diversity, Iranian organizations, ethnic diversity.*

1 Introduction

Optimal deployment of human and physical resources is a prerequisite for an organization's success in achieving its goals. The most crucial factor in this regard is the proper management of human resources. The field of human resource management has garnered significant scientific attention and has made notable theoretical and practical advancements. The complex and diverse personality of employees presents a significant challenge for organizations in the 21st century (Gholizadeh et al., 2011). Management encompasses several areas, some of which have received limited dynamic studies. Addressing this gap, particularly given the importance and diversity of human resources in ensuring organizational success, is essential. Despite uncertainties about the future of organizations, it can be argued that human resource diversity plays a decisive role in the future of organizations, not only in Iran but globally. National policies and human resource management sectors in organizations have somewhat recognized the importance of diversity and its management (Köllen, 2020). Ethnic identity is a multifaceted entity that revolves around issues such as beliefs, perspectives, knowledge, and individual ethnic values (Lam & Tran, 2022). Ethnic diversity, from ethnic tragedies in Africa to ethnic tensions in American cities, has become a focal point both in policy-making and academic studies (Alesina & Ferrara, 2005). The concept of "diversity management" first appeared in North America, particularly in the United States, and was immediately recognized in academic environments (Manoharan et al., 2019; Manoharan & Singal, 2017).

Studies on human resource diversity and its management have been conducted since the 1990s, with most of them addressing its benefits. However, most of these studies are descriptive, based on case studies and stories that merely confirm claims made by other researchers. Additionally, extensive studies on diversity management have not been conducted on a domain scale (Dixon et al., 2022; Maznevski, 1994; McLeod et al., 1996; Sukalova & Ceniga, 2020; Vanderschuere & Birdsall, 2018; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Each field or industry must address diversity management specifically and separately (García-Rodríguez et al., 2020). A brief review of recent studies published in this area indicates that they are primarily focused on hospitality and tourism centers, including notable studies by García-Rodríguez et al. (2020) and Manoharan & Singal (2017). It is unclear whether ethnic diversity is one of the most important factors in creating human resource diversity

among organizations in Iran (García-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Manoharan & Singal, 2017). Iran, as one of the oldest countries, is multi-ethnic and multilingual (Salehi, 2006). Although ethnic groups in Iran are relatively distinct in terms of language and other cultural characteristics, they have been recognized as the nation of Iran for centuries and share many similarities. Therefore, it appears that the concept of ethnic diversity in the Iranian workforce has its unique characteristics and requires independent examination. While some provinces have been historically multi-ethnic, others have recently become so due to widespread migration within the country's borders over the past decades (Shabani bahar et al., 2014).

In sum, workforce diversity is an essential phenomenon in organizations. Statistics indicate a growing diversity among the workforce in Iran, particularly in terms of ethnic diversity. This study aims to examine work diversity through systematic review with an emphasis on Iranian Organizations.

2 Methods and Materials

In the early 1990s, a team of epidemiologists and medical journal editors developed guidelines to improve the quality of reports reviewing healthcare-related studies. These guidelines are usually presented in the form of a checklist, flowchart, or explicit texts. Reporting methods and guidelines, which assist researchers in writing valid articles, include essential titles used for conducting a clear and transparent study. PRISMA is used as a guide/reference in writing meta-analytical reports. In 2009, QUOROM guidelines were revised to improve the quality of reporting in articles aimed at meta-analysis and systematic reviews and were renamed PRISMA. "Iranian ethnicities," "diversity management," and "workforce diversity" were searched in both Persian and English online research engines as keywords. After identifying, screening, and selecting appropriate sources based on the PRISMA model, the authors searched for articles and studies in this area. Among the 140 identified studies, 59 studies (19 in Persian and 40 in English) were selected by the authors. Most studies (12 Iranian and 28 international) address the outcomes/effects of diversity management. Except for one Iranian article (Hassanlou & Golrad, 2018), all studies confirmed and detailed the positive or potentially positive effects of diversity management, including improved creativity, productivity, job satisfaction, and problem-solving processes. Despite consensus on the positive outcomes of diversity management, only 12 articles addressed how to

manage diversity and related measures, indicating a research gap. Justice is the most examined issue related to diversity management in these studies, discussed in 11 articles (3 Iranian and 8 international). Gender is one of the most significant factors in creating diversity, addressed in 8 articles (1 Iranian and 7 international). Additionally, 4 articles are dedicated to the hospitality and tourism industry. Among the Iranian articles, several (6 instances) explore ethnic diversity on a macro level.

3 Findings and Results

3.1 The Importance of Diversity Management

Implementing diversity management is no longer an option but a necessity. Recent large-scale surveys of top 500 companies and other global organizations show that diversity and differences are considered a basic assumption (Shaker Ardakani et al., 2017). Diversity management helps organizations grow efficiently and is a crucial factor in business success and competitive advantage.

A workforce with ethnic diversity may have both advantages and disadvantages for organizations, while most studies have only expressed the positive aspects of diversity management. Some studies have also pointed out the disadvantages of ethnic diversity, such as social exclusion, communication disorders, and conflict (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Hassanlou and Golard (2017) suggest that there is an inverse relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance, meaning the greater the ethnic diversity, the less efficient the performance (Hassanlou & Golrad, 2018).

Despite being beyond employees' control, the mentioned differences significantly impact their organizational life and occasionally lead to discrimination. It is the ethical, social, and legal responsibility of managers to provide a work environment where individuals can live with their real identities rather than an organizational identity (Adli, 2010).

Organizations vary in the degree to which they value diversity and in their willingness to embrace change to support diversity. Nowadays, diversity must be recognized as a valuable asset in organizations (Gholizadeh et al., 2011). Diversity management can be defined as an approach capable of managing a heterogeneous workforce to maximize the potential benefits of diversity and minimize its potential disadvantages. Diversity management is not limited to accepting individual differences and replacing them. It should support these differences and use them to advance organizational progress (Shaker Ardakani et al., 2017).

3.2 Diversity Management and Communications

Communication serves as a process for exchanging information and conveying concepts, playing a functional role in meeting the ever-changing needs of humans on a large scale. It provides an outlet for expressing emotions, values, beliefs, attitudes, personalities, and motivations (Pourkhodabakhshi et al., 2011). Without communication, sharing knowledge in an organization is nearly impossible. Diversity management is a communicative tool. Here, its goal is to facilitate clear and effective communication among different members of an organization. Diversity management is a communicative action and reaction among various cultural groups and helps adapt to a culturally diverse environment (Gaisch et al., 2020).

In an organization with a diverse workforce, language barriers are a serious communication challenge in terms of proficiency in different languages and dialects (Sudhiir & Sudhiir, 2016). Employing staff with weak language skills and expertise impedes collaboration, communication, and productivity among team members. For instance, non-native employees in an American company who lack sufficient understanding of English face serious challenges in communicating with other employees and managers. Cultural diversity might lead to misunderstandings and decreased productivity. Therefore, companies and organizations must identify, address, and resolve the issues arising from diversity in the workplace (Cletus et al., 2018). Indeed, the effectiveness of communication depends on the extent to which the sender and receiver understand a message (Rollinson, 2008). Different languages and dialects are factors that can negatively affect the uniform understanding of a message. Consequently, organizations must be aware of these differences and adopt strategies to counteract communication barriers arising from diversity. In a multicultural work environment, understanding the implicit values that affect communication styles and addressing them to ensure accurate understanding is crucial for promoting cooperation and organizational success (Sudhiir & Sudhiir, 2016). Ignoring these issues can have a negative impact on organizational communications. This can be an obstacle to effective communication that reduces productivity and cohesion among human resources (Dixon et al., 2022). A lack of effective communication can also disrupt knowledge management within an organization. In recent decades, knowledge management has increasingly been recognized as a significant factor in creating a

competitive advantage for an organization (Bassett-Jones, 2005; McLeod et al., 1996).

Communications is a fragile process that can be affected by various factors. In a diverse work environment, communication can be defined as the exchange of information and concepts between human resources from different cultural backgrounds. The greater the cultural distance between the sender and receiver, the more likely communication will be ineffective (Adler, 1980). Particularly, language differences impede successful communication and create barriers to interpersonal interactions (Lauring & Selmer, 2011). In reviewing the role of cultural and language diversity, researchers have not limited themselves to negative outcomes, as some have also addressed its positive effects.

3.3 Diversity Management and Organizational Justice

Social justice is an integral part of social work as it is continuously debated among organizations and researchers in the field of social work (Dixon et al., 2022). Skillful adoption and implementation of the diversity principle can be defined in line with ensuring justice and equal use of opportunities for each individual, enabling participation in activities with respect (Malek Ghasemi, 2009). Discrimination in the workforce relates to differential treatment of minority groups based on their ethnic characteristics. Both employees and employers are subjected to the negative consequences of this discrimination (Carlsson & Rooth, 2007; Shakoori et al., 2020). Minorities often face mistreatment in Europe and North America, typically receiving lower wages and exhibiting lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They are more likely to leave the organization and are more susceptible to mental and physical illnesses. Additionally, employers who discriminate in the hiring process are more likely to leave the business in the medium term (Shakoori et al., 2020). Diversity management is a management strategy in the field of human resources that is part of an organization's social responsibility and is generally implemented from the top down. It strives to enhance effectiveness and productivity in terms of committing organizations to the hiring, retention, rewarding, and promotion of a heterogeneous and productive group of employees. It also aims to create equality among employees, decentralization, the promotion of multiple voices, and the encouragement of formal and informal communications (Ghanbary & Sharifi, 2020).

Fair and merit-based recruitment and hiring of the workforce play a constructive role in creating a diverse workforce. It should be noted that a selection system is fair when qualified individuals are chosen and hired for their ideal jobs regardless of gender, religion, color, ethnicity, etc. However, in practice, statistics prove that equal opportunity does not exist for all qualified individuals, as qualified people are deprived from the outset based on gender, color, or race. A survey in the United States on overseas assignments showed that 75% of them are carried out by Caucasian men. According to this study, only 14% are women and 11% are minorities (Madera et al., 2016; Shakoori et al., 2020). Although the financial skills of companies led by women have significantly improved, women's presence in senior decision-making positions is negligible. A meta-analysis of 40 studies on leadership claims that there are minor differences between the behaviors and leadership styles of men and women. This meta-analysis states that individuals' competence and merit, rather than stereotypical perceptions, should be the criteria for their promotion to higher organizational levels. This argument can be generalized to ethnic minorities and other minorities. As mentioned, the criterion for assigning missions to individuals should be their compatibility with the characteristics and conditions of the mission; thus, the most qualified should be assigned these missions. This leads to the creation of a diverse and capable group of human resources in an organization that aims to achieve its goals under proper working conditions (Shakoori et al., 2020).

3.4 Diversity Management and Social Capital

Intangible assets play an important role in organizations, the most notable of which is the concept of "social capital" introduced by Coleman (1998). This concept has been recognized and has increasingly gained importance in the social sciences. The effects of diversity at the organizational level depend on the organization's ability to promote integration, team cohesion, commitment, credibility, interaction, and the degree of connection. Coleman explains how individual behaviors are important in creating social capital in networks. Networks and communities with high social capital actually have individuals with high participation in society who feel responsible for others and are constantly involved in social issues. This potentially aids in creating strong relationships and norms that are the foundation of social capital, although it can also be called

psychological support and cooperation (Pourkhodabakhshi et al., 2011).

Social capital consists of trust and bonding in the form of tangible links and psychological bonds that can be defined as follows. Tangible links refer to tangible network structures through which individuals in society connect to each other. Based on psychological bonds, the relationship between individuals should be reciprocal, based on trust, and have positive emotions. Considering social capital as a network of values, thoughts, desires, and behaviors that lead to trust, understanding, and empathy among members of a group that makes achieving goals easier, it can be said that differences, divisions, and lack of honesty are threats to social capital because they enhance suspicion, pessimism, distrust, hatred, and resentment (Sarvar et al., 2015).

3.5 Diversity Management and Workforce Productivity

Productivity can be defined as the optimal use of factors involved in production. Identifying stages that lead to the growth and perfection of human resources, along with factors that threaten the efficiency of human resources, is the first step in enhancing human resource productivity. For the successful implementation of diversity management in organizations, managers must have sufficient knowledge about the benefits of a diverse workforce that strategic human resource planning should be based on (Khodadadhoseni et al., 2011; Rezaian & Ghasemi, 2011). Efficient use of differences that reflect diversity can strengthen an organization. Academic surveys definitively prove that diversity management has positive effects on task performance. A diverse workforce potentially increases organizational productivity, creativity, and innovation. Managing a diverse team can create competition. There is high potential for achieving goals and positive competition in organizations equipped with diverse experiences and skills (Rezaian & Ghasemi, 2011). To assess and enhance productivity, managers must consider various issues related to productivity. Simply put, employees should be relatively interested in and satisfied with the work they perform. Improving organizational productivity is an important aspect of managing organizational behavior (Khodadadhoseni et al., 2011). The real productivity of a team is the difference between its potential productivity and the harms caused by improper processes during a specific period. Real productivity increases when the members of a group work and collaborate effectively.

In multicultural and ethnic groups, the possibility of increasing productivity compared to homogeneous groups is greater, although the likelihood of errors in the work process is also higher in the former groups. Based on the relationship between real productivity and the extent of harm caused by improper processes during a specific period, the practical productivity of multicultural groups can be higher or lower than that of similar or different groups. Therefore, groups with cultural diversity are very productive in some aspects and naturally fall short in competition with homogeneous groups. Managers aware of this situation should try to optimally employ diverse resources in appropriate fields (Rezaian & Ghasemi, 2011).

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Today, human resource diversity is an essential aspect of field management, and organizations utilize proper management of it to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and organizational justice to their benefit (Ghanbary & Sharifi, 2020). For successful diversity management, managers must be aware of the benefits of diversity, which can be used to implement strategic human resource planning (Pourkhodabakhshi et al., 2011). Diversity management is a systematic program implemented by organizations for the recruitment, retention, and development of a heterogeneous workforce and is especially significant in human resources. A diverse workforce fosters a creative organization, thereby improving employee performance and organizational productivity/profitability. Implementing diversity management in an organization encourages employees to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors and has a positive impact on their performance, as diversity encourages employees to gain new perspectives and a better understanding of organizational concerns. A review of the studies conducted in this article highlights the importance of diversity among both Iranian and international researchers. Among the 56 articles reviewed in this study, the majority (12 Iranian and 25 international articles) address the outcomes and impacts of diversity management. Except for one Iranian study (Hassanlou & Golrad, 2018), all studies confirm the positive effects of diversity management, such as enhanced creativity, productivity, job satisfaction, and problem-solving processes. Justice is the most studied aspect in relation to diversity management, with 10 studies (3 Iranian and 7 international) dedicated to it. This relates to a meta-analysis by Yadav and Lenka (2020), which reviewed articles published between 1991 and 2018 on organizational

diversity, where equity was often the focus. In international studies, gender equality received considerable attention, as many studies on diversity management were devoted to the role of women in the workforce. In the articles reviewed in this research, gender was the most significant factor concerning workforce diversity, addressed in 6 articles (1 Iranian and 5 international) (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). However, other factors contributing to diversity, particularly ethnic diversity, which is a critical factor in Iran, have been overlooked in both Iranian and international studies. Ethnic diversity studies in Iran (6 articles) have addressed it at national and macro levels rather than organizational ones. Therefore, ethnic diversity as one of the most important factors of diversity should be thoroughly examined, especially in Iran where it plays a significant role in the history of the country and its organizations. The review of the literature also indicates that workforce diversity is academically recognized not only because of its positive organizational impacts but also due to the legal and ethical requirements that make it inevitable in the world we live in. Moreover, it can be argued that the performance of diversity management at the organizational level has been overlooked. It is notable that most researchers in the United States and Western European countries adopt quantitative approaches, which highlights the importance of qualitative approaches. Ethnicity is widely studied at national and macro levels in Iran, particularly in fields such as economic development, political science, and sociology. However, from an organizational level, diversity has been examined from a general perspective. Iranian researchers active in the field of diversity management have failed to provide a native model for examining ethnic differences in Iran. Proponents of postmodernism emphasize the end of grand narratives and theories in favor of native and specific narratives. The importance of this issue is doubled in the field of diversity management in Iranian organizations because there is a fundamental difference between workforce diversity in Iran and Western countries. This indicates the necessity of conducting extensive native research in this area to provide suitable models. Ethnic diversity, in general, is a sensitive social issue in Iran. As a result, much research has not been conducted at the organizational level. The lack of extensive prior research on this topic is the main limitation of this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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