

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY - SETTING COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT AHEAD

Raghavi.K¹, Gopinathan.N²

¹Research Scholar, Sathyabama University, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sathyabama University, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India

¹Address for Correspondence: No.1/80A, K S S Street, Kelambakkam, Chennai – 603103, Tamilnadu, India

¹eMail: raghavi.k@gmail.com ¹Mobile Number: +91 99406 33177

Abstract - Competitive advantage of an organization depends largely on the ability to activate and use organizational resources. As a result, the internal capabilities of the organization include, focuses on Strategic Management, Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management as well as on employees' competencies, in particular. Successful organizations match these competencies to the maturity level of the organization for effective execution of competency management where the competencies reflect the organization's culture, business strategy and unique market dynamics. Beyond doubt, Human Resources are the valuable assets of the organization who actually crystallize the strategic plans into consistent performance and drive business success. Human Resources are obtainable with different backgrounds, skills and abilities who work toward the goal or purpose of the organization. These diverse set of employees are driven by policies and practices for stimulating equality. Accordingly the organization's competency level is developed for the rapidly changing global business.

Keywords – Competency, Diversity, Equality of Opportunity, Business Success, Competitive Advantage

INTRODUCTION

The competency movement has been gaining momentum across all the industries. Traditional competency is viewed as comprising three component parts knowledge, skills and performance abilities. So, in order to be a competent performer at work, employees must be able to apply their knowledge, skills and performance ability within a specific work setting. At the same time personal, interpersonal and team competencies are equally important in the competency mix. As work becomes more specialized, the need to work as a team increases. Employability super cedes employment. People are no longer seen as job holders with life long career prospects, but rather are viewed as packages of capabilities. More complex problems at work demand strong interpersonal relationships and interdisciplinary teamwork. Change, globalization, technology, all add fuel to the expectations, roles and competency make-up of every individual. Increasingly, workplace practices are viewed as a series of projects to be handled.

The Human Resources have attempted to link various HR policies and practices to the employees' capabilities for better productivity and profits. Diversified employees yield varied competencies thereby providing the organization to have an edge over its competitors. In recent years, there has been a gradual movement in the direction of greater respect for equal opportunity. The philosophy of Equal Opportunity practice is allied with the effort to ensure that the organizations make the most out of the differences from a diverse workforce rather than

losing talent which assist the organization to be more efficient and effective. These emerging patterns substantiates that more the diversity of employees, stronger the organization.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

An Overview

Equal Opportunity is the principle of non-discrimination which emphasizes that opportunities in education, employment, advancement, benefits and resource distribution, and other areas should be freely available to all citizens irrespective of their age, race, gender, gender-reassignment, religion, political association, color, ethnic origin, civil partnership status, disability, nationality, pregnancy and maternity, parental responsibilities or any other individual or group characteristic unrelated to ability, performance, and qualification.

It is a stipulation that all people should be treated similarly, unhampered by artificial barriers or prejudices or preferences, except when particular ‘distinctions can be explicitly justified’.

The Times Past

Equal Opportunity practices were instated in the 1960s. The Kennedy administration, as a part of its emphasis on civil rights, issued Executive Order 10925 requiring all government contractors to ‘take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin’. The administration also created the President’s Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, which later became the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Subsequent administrations continued this work.

The Johnson administration’s Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed segregation in certain types of employment and the Nixon administration initiated the Philadelphia Plan, the first equal opportunity initiative to include numeric goals. President Lyndon Johnson, who sought to continue Kennedy's policies with his own set of programs called the Great Society that aimed at eliminating employment discrimination based on the usual litany of race, religion, sex, or national origin. Further, this has been amended on numerous occasions in the past 30 years, including the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, the Civil Rights Reformation Act of 1987, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.

Equal Opportunity Practices

In today's emerging markets, organizations that seek to be leaders and trend setters of corporate social responsibility while building a productive and diverse workforce address issues of discrimination in the workplace. Businesses that flourish in doing so, act decisively to eliminate discriminatory practices and create the conditions for diversity, equality of opportunity, treatment in employment and often go beyond what is required of them by national law. Employers who adopt such approaches may derive business advantages like:

- i. Penetration of new markets
- ii. Improved employee morale
- iii. Wider pool of talent to recruit from
- iv. Reduced exposure to legal challenges
- v. Reputational benefits

Accordingly, Equal Opportunities practices help ensure that organizations provide equal and fair chances to all.

Elements of Equal Opportunity Practices

Research carried out through online surveys and interviews (Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of California, Berkeley, 2008) examined nine elements of Equal Opportunity Practices. They are:

Advertising - Using media, a web presence and targeted events to advertise open positions to diverse applicants

Data Collection and Analysis - Collecting data on diversity in order to analyze disparity and discrimination

Diversity Trainings - Holding trainings to help all involved, be more comfortable in diverse environments and to combat the negative assumptions that can lead to discriminatory behavior

Goal Setting - Setting expectations for employees to be hired, promoted or awarded contracts

Leadership - Committing to Equal Opportunity efforts through the words and actions of top leaders of the organization

Mentoring Programs - Helping employees survive and advance by pairing them with mentors

Performance Assessments - Evaluating employees' performance to determine strategies for effective functioning and proper advancement

Selection of Employees and Contractors - Defining specific selection criteria for hiring and promoting employees

Skills Development - Facilitating the acquisition of skills needed to advance as an employee

The Motivators of Equal Opportunity Practices

The purpose of the Equal Opportunity practices is to enhance a workplace that provides equality of opportunities for all current, future and potential employees and where their dignity is protected and respected at all times. This will require the development of practices and procedures that cover the following aspects of employment:

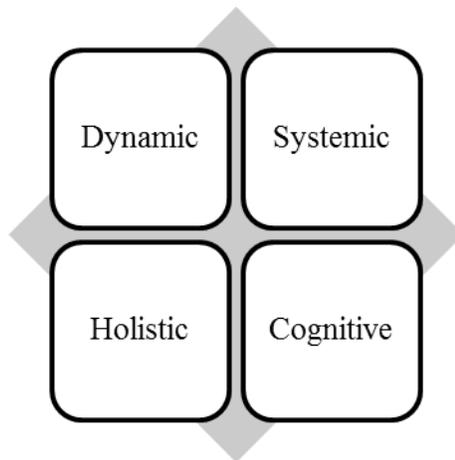
- i. Equal Opportunity policy to be developed with regard to the statutory framework and best practice where information and guidance are to be sought regularly from relevant organizations for best practice developments

- ii. Recruitment and Selection processes designed to ensure that all candidates are assessed objectively against standard, job-specific criteria. The process to be managed by people trained in equal opportunities and diversity best practice. Everyone involved in recruitment activity to adhere to the policy and receive appropriate training and guidance in fair and objective selection methods. Also, the recruitment and selection policy are to be reviewed on an annual basis
- iii. Opportunities for training, development and career progression are to be open to everyone. All members of the organization are to have access to a comprehensive program of training, including job-related and professional development. The organization to support further education and opportunities for formal legal qualification open for all on the application of objective measurable criteria. All training and development needs are to be identified on the basis of individual skills requirements and business needs
- iv. The organization to support flexible working and operate on a flexible working policy, which enables all employees to apply for flexible working practices. The Human Resource professionals are to be fully trained in the implementation of this policy and provide guidance and training to managers as appropriate
- v. Performance is to be managed on the basis of objective and measurable criteria, related directly to the success of the organization. Measures to support and tackle underperformance to focus on these criteria. Managers are to be trained in the use of constructive feedback and performance management techniques
- vi. The reward policy and practices to ensure that the organization's reward package is benchmarked externally and that internal comparisons are fair by a process of annual audit
- vii. Individuals are to be supported in bringing claims of bullying, harassment or discrimination. All claims are to be treated sensitively and confidentially by the experts of the organization, trained in dealing with such matters. Cases are to be resolved as quickly as possible. Where acts of harassment, bullying or discrimination are found to have taken place, they will have to be subject to disciplinary proceedings
- viii. A positive working environment is to be supported through people management policies and practices and working relationships
- ix. Partners and employees are required to adhere to this policy and principles in all aspects of their working life, including service to clients, and relationships with clients, suppliers and others outside the organization

COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT

Competency Management is a systematic method to find on the means by which organizations achieve excellent performance and most importantly endure that performance. The significance of competency management lies in the fact that it can provide a theoretical explanation about the way in which organizations will be able to attain as well as sustain competitive advantage. It stresses on the competence of an organization rather than on the environment in which it functions. It helps achieve competitive advantage based on the following four corner-stones:

Competence Management Approaches



Source: Sanchez & Heene, 2004

The strategic theory by Sanchez and Heene (2004) defines competence as the ability to sustain the coordinated deployment of resources in ways that helps an organization achieve its goals (creating and distributing value to customers and stakeholders).

Competency and Competency Model

Competencies are basically defined as knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and attributes to fulfill a certain role. People who are successful most frequently exhibit these competencies. A clearly defined set of competencies is the hallmark of a true profession.

Over the last thirty years, the study of competency management has been extensive. Key findings corroborate that the requirements for successful competency management of an organization is the formation of a table of elements for each of the core competencies of employees. With all the elements identified, it's the challenge for the Human Resource professionals to choose critical competencies for appropriate positions. This is where the practice of competency model comes into play.

Competency Modeling is the process of analyzing and describing types and range of abilities, knowledge, and skills present in an organization, or which it needs to acquire to gain a competitive advantage. Devising competency models helps improve individual and organizational efficiency in the areas of:

- i. Performance Management
- ii. Compensation Management
- iii. Succession Planning and Career Management
- iv. Management Learning
- v. Recruitment and Staffing
- vi. Skills Assessment and Skills Inventory

EQUALITY AND COMPETENCY – THE CORRELATION

While recruiting candidates or promoting employees, the Human Resources Manager not only insists on competency in Equal Employment Opportunity, but probes for it by a deft interview. Then, by engaging the new recruits on Equal Opportunity Practices while considering for the respective role and position, the Human Resource team can signal how seriously the organization takes Equality of Opportunity and make sure first-hand that the new joiner has the degree of competency required. Equal Opportunity truly starts from the Top Management when it becomes a competency required of everyone. However, Equality of Opportunity is an essential leadership competency on which every employee of the organization should be expected to perform well. Below is a framework which explicitly interprets equality that locates competency management ahead of other approaches:



With the commitment to Equal Opportunity and leadership competence in addressing it – flowing from the top till the bottom level hierarchy, such organizations create the potential for a wealth of business benefits. The organization becomes open to infusions of fresh ideas and new perspectives that can lead to previously unrecognized opportunities in products, services and markets. Operations across borders and cultures benefit from greater understanding and cooperation, boosting productivity and effectiveness. The organization earns an enviable reputation that strengthens the brand, appeals to increasingly diverse customers, attracts top talent from whatever source, and energizes all employees – across all differences.

THE NEED FOR DIVERSIFIED SET OF COMPETENCIES

Equality of Opportunity in business is changing due to rapid technological advancements, globalization, immigration, increased demand for skills and education and an aging workforce in a large part of the world. From being compliance-driven and tactical at its inception, Equal Opportunity Practices have grown into a business-driven and strategic culture. Following are the key trends that drive changes in Equal Employment Opportunity thus defining the need for new thinking regarding competencies:

Globalization

As employees and managers are asked to work with team members, business partners, and customers from around the world, a global perspective and novel competencies have become imperatives (Human Resource Planning Society, August 2007).

Demographic Shifts

Soaring economic growth rates coupled with limited numbers of skilled workers causing high levels of turnover on one hand and Aging labor pool causing demands for increased flexibility and redefining employee needs and expectations on the other hand require organizations to be at the forefront of workforce strategies that exhibit competence, flexibility, and business acumen.

Technology

Technology has increased accessibility to information and transparency on the part of organizations. It has also made global communication simpler and faster than ever. At the same time, technology could de-personalize the industry, if not used judiciously.

Socio-Political Climate

Managing conflicts and building inclusion, despite of rapid globalization, strong religious, political and nationalist divides within an organization is a major challenge and wants for unique competencies.

Legal Environment / Regulation

Increased regulation and media attention have added new dimensions to organizations' compliance requirements. More than ever, organizations need to be just as concerned about the damage legal problems will do to their reputation, brand image, community relationships and stock price as they are about legal fees and financial awards.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – THE IMPETUS FOR COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT

Crafting a competency model helps achieve attaining competitive advantage by effective implementation of Competency Management through Equal Opportunity practices. Council Perspectives from Conference Board Council (2008) identified seven key competencies and their associated competencies for implementing Equal Opportunity. This model covers a broad range and depth of skills and a wide set of competencies.

i. Change Management

Equality of Opportunity is a culture change and growth strategy. Given the rapidly shifting business realities these strategies are routinely challenged to nimbly change course to reach business objectives. Therefore, change management is a critical success factor and its related competencies are:

Organization Development – Understanding and facilitating the change process through completion

Corporate Communication – Communicating the full gamut of Equal Opportunity

Critical Interventions – Offering useful and timely interventions in situations where progress is impeded due to diversity related issues

ii. Equal Opportunity and Global Perspective

The top management to be conversant on best practices of Equal Opportunity and emerging trends within the industry and able to customize and apply to enhance business outcomes of the organization by:

Cultural Competence – Understanding and demonstrating multiple cultural frameworks, values and norms

Negotiation and Facilitation – Negotiating and facilitating through cultural differences or conflicts

Continuous Learning – Recognizing and addressing privileges, biases and cultural preferences

Complex Group Dynamics – Understanding and managing group dynamics and ambiguity effectively

Judgement – Discerning when to inquire, advocate, drive or resolve more decisively

Subject Matter Expertise – Effectively implementing Equal Opportunity practices

iii. Business Acumen

Making business case for Equal Opportunity through thorough understanding of the market and the business in creating insights to contribute to business results:

External Market Knowledge – Understanding current and changing global and local trends, diverse customer / client needs and using competitive intelligence

Holistic Business Knowledge – Understanding the impact of financial, economic, market drivers and core business strategy

Return on Investment – Determining and communicating the contribution of equality practices to core business strategy and results

iv. Strategic External Relations

From tapping emerging markets to managing positive media and community relations, senior employees of organization are responsible for contributing to external relationships. Equal Opportunity practitioners are no longer solely focused on internal employee issues. Today organizations are involved in philanthropic efforts, responsible for supplier diversity; expertise to

marketing campaigns, and is a key player in the creation and enhancement of brands and reputations. Associated competencies are:

Corporate Social Responsibility – Influencing media and marketplace through communication and community outreach to competitively position the organization

Strategic Alliances – Identifying, partnering and leveraging relationships with key external organizations / leaders to enhance business results

Market / Supplier Diversity - Identifying, partnering and leveraging relationships with key external diverse suppliers, organizations and customers to enhance supply chain and increase market share, revenues and loyalty

Brand Management – Positively influencing media and marketplace

v. **Integrity**

In order to gain credibility and stature, build relationships and garner support, Equal Opportunity employers need to be ethical, resilient, influential, empathic and skilled communicators:

Ethics – Speaking with candor and tact and behaving in a way that leads others to trust

Resilience – Pursuing goals with drive and energy

Influence – Negotiating and persuading effectively at all levels of the organization and adapting approach to fit audience

Empathy – Understanding the point of view and emotions of others and acknowledging in a stated or unstated fashion

Communication – Knowing where resources are how to access them

vi. **Visionary & Strategic Leadership**

Successful Equal Opportunity employers are not only strategic leaders but also visionaries by conveying it in a manner that rouses enthusiasm of others and have the power to get things done through relationships and influence:

Equal Opportunity Future State – Collaborating appropriately with others to envision and convey an inspiring, compelling and relevant future state by actively seeking new ideas, experiences and thought leaders and framing new directions in understandable, innovative and inspiring terms

Pragmatism – Differentiating between strategy and tactics, driving alignment with clients, partners and stakeholders and proactively creating foundation for influence at all levels of the organization

Political Savoir-Faire – Possessing the ability to influence and execute beyond positional power and managing complex and sensitive matters

vii. HR Competencies

Identification of opportunities for various disciplines of Human Resources is a critical competency:

Talent Management, Enhancement and Operation – Providing program options that ensure equitable treatment and mitigate disparities

Compliance – Understanding applicable laws, regulations and government requirements and their impact on business

Employee Relations – Working with others appropriate to the situation to resolve individual and group conflict including development and delivery of successful interventions

POSITIVE BENEFITS OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – COMPETENCY BASED MODEL

Business advantages derived from a model based on competency and equality of opportunity include:

- i. Being the employer of choice - promoting their values and commitment to diversity is one tool organizations use in attracting the best talent
- ii. Attracting candidates from the widest possible pool of potential applicants
- iii. Retention of employees in whom the organization has invested
- iv. Better integration of all groups into the workplace
- v. More effective and efficient use of the skills, talents and capabilities available to an organization
- vi. A work environment that is flexible and responsive to change
- vii. Increased staff motivation and commitment
- viii. Improved quality of working life
- ix. A workplace which is respectful of the dignity of all
- x. Improved productivity through increased employee morale, job satisfaction and reduced turnover
- xi. A better market focus with an understanding of changing customer base and awareness of customer needs
- xii. Enhanced reputation
- xiii. Increased competitiveness, creativity and productivity
- xiv. Reduced vulnerability to legal challenges

CONCLUSION

Rapidly changing business realities require today's global organizations to meet higher expectations than ever before. Emphasis has progressed from valuing differences, which was largely achieved through awareness training and multi-cultural celebrations, to strategic business growth, with a focus on cornering new markets, building the effectiveness of global teams, and managing brand reputation.

More than ever, organizations are adopting Equal Opportunity practices to instill knowledge and skills to forge new competitive ground for their organizations, build relationships, and develop credibility across cultural contexts. Organizations are able to meet projected goals and objectives a lot faster as there are diverse people working toward them. To what degree an organization both embraces the ethos of equal opportunities and backs it up with an investment in sound policies and practices may be expected to have an impact on both the progress of employees and their experience in the workplace in the organization.

REFERENCES

- An Equal Opportunities / Diversity Policy & Strategy Objectives for the Health Service. 2004. **Health Service Employers Agency**: 6-10
- Boyd Childress. 2010. Equal Opportunity. **Reference for Business – Encyclopedia of Business**, 2nd edition
- Brian Becker, Berry Gerhart. 1996. **Academy of Management Journal**
- Colm O'Connell. 2009. **The place of equal opportunities in the devolution settlement: a legal analysis**. Faculty of Laws UCL, Equality and Human Rights Commission, ISBN 978-1-84206-194-7: 20-25
- **Egon Zehnder International** 2011. What CEOs Need to Know to Make Diversity and Inclusion Really Work? : 5-11
- Dr. D.Paul Dhinakaran, “*Community Relations Of Tamilnadu State Transport Corporation Ltd*” International Journal Of Research And Analytical Reviews (E ISSN 2348-1269, print ISSN 2349-5138) Special Issue March 2019.
- **Employers Forum on Age**. 2007. Getting Recruitment Right: 5-11
- **Good Practice Notes**. 2006. Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity – 5th Series
- Indra Lahiri. 2008. Creating a Competency Model for Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners **Council Perspective** cp-005. The Conference Board Inc: 5-20
- J. Evelyn Orr, Craig Sneltsjes and Guangrong Dai 2010 **The art and science of competency modeling: best practices in developing and implementing success profiles**. The Korn / Ferry Institute: 3-7
- Josh Bersin. 2007. The Relationship between Competencies and Financial Performance. **Talent Management**, MediaTec Publishing Inc. 28(2): 4
- D.Paul Dhinakaran, “Passengers’ Perception towards Service Quality in Tamilnadu State Transport Corporation (Kumbakonam) Limited, Kumbakonam” Asia Pacific Journal of Research, (ISSN: 2320-5504,) Volume I, Issue XIII, January 2014, P.170-181.
- John Butler. 2000. Competency Confusion. **Century Management**
- Maria Vakola, Klas Eric Soderquist, Gregory P. Prastacos. 2007. Competency Management in support of Organizational Change. **International Journal of Manpower** Vol. 28 Issue: 3/4: 260 – 275
- Michael D. Sumner, PhD, Carol J. Silverman, PhD Thelton E. Henderson. 2008. **The path to equal opportunity: An investigation of best practices in employment and contracting**. Center for Social Justice University of California, Berkeley, School of Law (Boalt Hall): 6-21
- Sanchez.R, Heene.A. 2004. **The new strategic management: Organization, competition and competence**. New York: Wiley