

Fostering a Diversity Culture in Business: Npower and the Recruitment of Ethnic Minorities

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Abstract

This research delves into a multi layered reality of Diversity in recruitment from NPower. The purpose of this small scale research was to evaluate the practice of diversity in recruitment in the organization to attempt answering wider questions regarding the importance of diversity in business and the challenges in its practical implementation. Although there is a vast amount of literature and research on the sociologically, ethically and economically important subject of Diversity; this research develops the idea further by delving into the organizational practice of the policy, evaluating the problems and challenges in its practical implementation. In order to answer the questions raised by this study, the researcher relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews. Data generated by these semi structured interviews formed the basis for theorising in this inductive research. In addition, statistical data of employee composition by ethnicity was presented to supplement the information provided by the interviews. Having made best use of the resources available and worked within the constraints of a small scale academic project, the researcher asserts that this research, although by no means the final word on this subject, can be a reference or a starting point for further research in the field.

Keywords: Diversity, Recruitment Policy, Ethnic Minorities, Glass Ceiling, Bottle Neck, Diverse Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Webster dictionary defines Diversity as 'the condition of being different: of having differences within, between and among people and valuing this' (Webster, 2015). In business, diversity in recruitment refers to a mixed workforce comprising of people with a wide range of abilities, knowledge and experience owing to their heterogeneity in ethnic backgrounds, age, gender, physical attributes and religious beliefs.

In the light of the UK legislation on Equal Rights, Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976 (amendment) 2003, and Government Recommendation on Diversity in business (Code of Practice on The Duty

to Promote Race Equality, 2003) for private as well as public sector, the issue of recruitment of ethnic minorities, in NPower is the focus of this research.

“The RRA (1976) makes it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origin. This Act covers recruitment, promotion and training. The Act covers direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and victimization,” (UK Government, 2003). While on the other hand, the Code of Practice on The Duty to Promote Race Equality provides guidance on tackling racial discrimination for the promotion of a diverse employee base.

It is noteworthy that while there exists a law to ensure the provision of Equal Opportunities; promoting Diversity, much less ensuring it, has been left to the good judgement of recruiters. The distinction is an important one to make:

Legislation has been defined as “A law which has been promulgated by a legislature or other governing body. Legislation can have many purposes: to regulate, to authorize, to provide (funds), to sanction, to grant, to declare or to restrict.” (MS Encarta, 2015).

A code of practice, on the other hand, has been defined as “Written guidelines issued by an official body or a professional association to its members to help them comply with its ethical standards,” (MS Encarta, 2015). Therefore, while it is a statutory requirement for employers to provide Equal Opportunities, they are not under any legal obligation to ensure that their employee base is a culturally and racially diverse one.

However, owing to factors like awareness, cosmopolitanism and globalization, many large business organizations actively encourage diversity among their employees and mention it in their Corporate Responsibility (CR) reports. In a purely capitalistic way, too, the concept makes business sense. “The variety reflects the make-up of modern society and enables organizations to understand their customers’ needs and adapt their operations to meet them,” (Dale, 2003). In order to know in what way and how a business can gain from it, one needs to understand what the term Diversity implies. Most of these assumptions are based on an ethnicity construct which creates distinctions like ‘us’ and ‘them’. There are many social, psychological and economic barriers to the practical implementation of the concept of diversity in the recruitment process. This research aims at looking into these very challenges to ascertain the effectiveness of NPower’s policy of commitment to ‘fostering a diversity culture’.

1.1 Organizational Context

“NPower is a leading integrated UK energy company and is a part of the RWE group that employs a workforce of over 60,000 at 60 sites (NPower, 2015). With such a large employee base, it would be reasonable to suggest that it needs talent employees from diverse backgrounds.

This need is succinctly expressed in NPower’s “commitment to creating an inclusive culture which values the characteristics that make individuals unique and able to contribute to making our business successful through their different perspectives, skills and talent,”(NPower, 2015). The company has created a Diversity Action Group (DAG) which is the Human Resource director of NPower with the objective of promoting diversity and inclusion across the company.

In face of its explicit affiliation with the principle of Diversity in recruitment, the research, through this project, aims at studying the commitment of NPower to its policy of fostering diversity among its workforce, the measures employed by NPower to practically implement its policy and the effectiveness of those measures.

However, there are several aspects of the term ‘diversity’ and many problems in its practical implementation in the recruitment process. This research aims at looking into these very challenges to ascertain the effectiveness of the company’s policy of commitment to equal opportunities with reference to ethnic minority. The researcher believes that it is an important

area for scrutiny and NPower would be an ideal subject to look into for its sheer size, clear policy on diversity in recruitment and convenience in the form of vicinity as well as easy availability of data to the researcher.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Aim:

The issues, at the core of this research, have been analysed and discussed in the context of diversity initiatives at NPower. This research aims at gauging the effectiveness of the measures employed by the organization in line with its diversity policy, the research topic being: "Fostering a Diversity Culture in Business: NPower and the Recruitment of Ethnic Minorities"

Objectives:

The main objectives of this research are:

- 1) Why Diversity? In what way does it serve the larger purpose of the organization? How is it different from Equal Opportunities?
- 2) How does one translate Policy into Practice? What are the problems in doing so?
- 3) Glass Ceiling and Ethnic Minorities: What do they consist of?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a vast amount of literature available on the sociologically as well as economically significant topic of 'diversity' in business (for e.g. Spradlin, 2015; Bagihole, 2009; Weller, 2008; Thompson, 2015; and Titley, 2008). The terms, Diversity and Equal Opportunity in recruitment, have been discussed, explained and analysed at length in several books, journal articles, news articles and government policy papers (for e.g. Tulshyan, 2013; Dunne et al, 2010; Healey, 2012 and Ferdman, 2011). From stark reports of discrimination to laws for its prevention, from benefits of diversity to measures to promote it, and from challenges and barriers in fair selection to possible methods to break them; many authors, reporters and government policy makers have discussed the issue in depth (for e.g. Gravells and Simpson, 2013 and Mannix and Neale, 2007). Based on analytical study of vast information available on the subject, this literature review aims at critically assessing and evaluating the following areas:

2.1 Diversity: What does it mean?

In a business, diversity in recruitment refers to a mixed workforce comprising of people with a wide range of abilities, knowledge and experience owing to their heterogeneity in ethnic backgrounds, age, gender, physical attributes and religious beliefs.

Due to legislative connection between the two, Diversity is often misunderstood to be interchangeable with Equal Rights. While people from 'diverse' backgrounds are 'equal' in the eyes of law, diversity as a concept goes beyond the 'sameness' that the term equality seems to imply. 'Instead of trying to eliminate differences, it (Diversity) positively welcomes them,' (Herring and Henderson, 2015).

Kirton and Greene (2015) states that managing diversity at workplace has been succinctly defined as the continuous process of, 'negotiating interaction across culturally diverse groups, and contriving to get along in an environment characterized by cultural diversity,' (Cited in: Thiederman, 2008). While managing a diverse workforce may be a challenging proposition, many companies show commitment to the concept in their policy literature. Industrial commitment to diversity requires special measures. Ross and Schneider (1992) state that 'if an organization is really concerned with diversity rather than just equality, then it needs to look at its total culture – not just its systems,' (Cited in: Breams, 2015; and Harvey and Allard, 2012).

2.2 Legislative Framework: A starting point

The legislative framework protecting the rights of ethnic minorities to find work on merit may sound sinister, it demonstrates the comfort the 'protected' takes from legislation. Law defines a framework, within which a company must operate, and dictates certain 'behaviour' refuting which

leads to penalisation. In strictly this sense, a legal framework sets minimum standards and is extremely important. Ross and Schneider (1992) state that 'the aim of legislation in this field (Diversity) is to eliminate unfair discrimination and ensure equal treatment,' (Cited in: Healey, 2012).

The UK government has taken several measures to protect the rights of people from ethnic minorities. It has set up bodies like Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) to advocate diversity, promote fair selection and address the complaints of discrimination. In order to encourage implementation of policy into practice, the Government espouses a systematic monitoring of workforce profile by companies. 'The EOC Code of Practice recommends that companies monitor their practices and workforce profile in order to identify the extent and location of any barriers to Equal Opportunities,' (Bream, 2015; and Hunter and Swan, 2007).

The stress on formal adoption and clear statement of policies, by organizations, in this regard has been backed by academic as well as industrial research on different occasions. Different experts have reached similar conclusions about the importance of formalization of policy by organizations on the basis of case studies, empirical researches and academic studies (for e.g. Thiederman, 2012; Ariss, 2010; Takaki, 1993; Madood et al., 1997; Zane, 2002). 'The CRE and its predecessor the Race Relations Board have argued that if discrimination is to be eradicated, employers must adopt formal equal opportunities or affirmative action policies,' (Donnellan, 2001).

However, that is not where the responsibility of an organization would end; as involvement of its staff in the implementation of these policies is crucial to their success in actual work atmosphere. 'The engagement and involvement of staff and their representatives is the key to truly changing attitudes and culture within an organization,' (CIPD, 2014).

It is important to acknowledge the fact that a legislative framework has its limitations as the success or failure of policy in recruitment is largely dependent upon the will and action of the organization in question. 'While the state may have considerable power to stimulate action, the success of legislative and other measures in the area of employment is to a great extent dependent upon the actions of individual managements and managers in both the public and private sectors,' (CIPD, 2014).

Despite this seemingly dim view of the limited role of law, its importance in defining issues and encouraging good practice should not be underestimated. 'The aim of legislation in this field is to eliminate unfair discrimination and ensure equal treatment,' (Atropo, 2012; and Cashmore, 2000). In this sense, a legislative framework should be looked upon as a starting point and not the process in itself. It can be a guiding force in the light of which a conscientious culture of diversity can be fostered within organizations.

2.3 Why Diversity?

Now that there is a legislative framework around the issue and policy recommendations have been made to public and private sector, the question of why (what are the benefits of Diversity?) arises before how (methods of implementation of the policy). The economic aspect of this conundrum is as compelling as the moral, social and ethical aspects. The Business Benefits of Race Equality at Work report commissioned by the Department of Education and Employment shows that 'an ethnically diverse workforce certainly pays as companies making efforts in increasing race equality demonstrated increased staff retention, reduced recruitment shortages, improved employee relations, better customer service, increased sales and improved marketing,' (Denny, 2000).

In a rapidly globalising world, the corporations and business houses are getting bigger by the day. These companies have offices all around the globe and a diverse clientele. 'There are tangible business reasons for managing diversity: actively pursuing diversity in the workplace is of great

value and can have direct impact on an organization's productivity and profitability. By investing in diversity a company can create a larger pool of talent which can provide a competitive edge in the industry,' (Goessl, 2008).

Advocates of a diverse workforce reason it out by explaining that 'when an organization is comprised of groups of people with different experiences and backgrounds, more innovative and creative ideas are a distinct result,' (Lou, 2008). Similar ideas have been expressed by other thinkers and management writers. 'It is only natural that people who have varying life experiences and perspectives would be able to come up with unique solutions to problems which may not arise from groups who think similarly; this is of great value to an organization,' (Erickson, 2009).

The concept of diversity has found an important and powerful advocate in Capitalism. 'While the moral dimension of diversity and inclusion is important, it is very much in the background. Diversity initiatives are market driven, promoted by the need to have an innovative workforce,' (Pollitt, 2006).

2.4 The Counter Argument

Proponents of Diversity at workplace present it as some kind of a 'cure all' or panacea that is supposed to benefit an organization in many ways. This has been deemed an 'over enthusiastic' and 'unfounded' bias by critics of the concept who question its purported benefits. A critical review of literature on the topic revealed that the concept of Diversity is contested and open to debate.

Sociologists, academicians and thinkers have discussed governmental diversity initiatives as narrow and limited in vision as they only achieve an artificial mixing of several elements in place of a cohesive society or workplace. 'It is called social engineering, and its purpose is to create campuses and workplaces that look like a United Nations chef's salad of skin colour. The idea -- I'm guessing here -- is that if a white student sits at a desk flanked by a black and a Hispanic, all three students will somehow be transformed,' (Bloom, 2006).

A particularly scathing criticism of the policy discussed the possible assumptions behind the widely held support for Diversity, 'consider the sheer paternalism of it. 1) It makes the assumption that being a minority is a handicap. 2) It makes the assumption that minorities are less capable of hard work and academic achievement. 3) It makes the assumption that all whites, given a choice, will wield power in such a way as to hold minorities back,' (Rothman, 2008).

Questions have been raised about the need for a diverse workforce and the validity of its widely proclaimed benefits. Many experts have emphatically stated that Diversity, in organizational context, is problematic and overrated. 'Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam has published his study finding that diversity has its downside—in more "diverse" communities, there is less social cooperation and more of what he calls "hunkering down" (Washington Post, 2007).

Researchers studying the after effects of implementation of Diversity policy have concluded that despite efforts to form a multi cultural and diverse workforce most organizations achieve numbers but 'don't get the hoped-for harmony and understanding across racial and cultural groups; just a steady stream of demands for special benefits and treatment by spokes persons for those groups,' (National Review, 2009).

'One way in which it fails is that not all members of racial minority groups have different backgrounds simply due to their race. Blacks as well as Whites can come from the inner city, just as members of all races can hail from differing walks of life. It is therefore unfair and inaccurate to believe that minorities have a different perspective simply due to ethnicity,' (Rothman, 2008).

There are other underlying issues that need to be examined as well. The sociological effects of the concept of diversity have been criticized for its separatist tendencies. 'Emphasizing people's racial differences can have a deleterious effect. It separates humanity, classifies us into arbitrary categories, and has a number of other negative consequences as well,' (Bloom, 2006).

Questions have also been raised on the supposed links between lack of diversity in an organization and racial discrimination. 'Does under-representation of ethnic minorities in particular organisations or occupations— in terms of either their population from which an employer draws his workforce or in terms of their rate of hiring or promotion compared with whites – constitutes prima facie evidence of discrimination; the corollary being that discrimination has ended only when proportionate representation has been attained,' (Keita and Hurrell eds., 2002). The question that needs to be asked here is whether having a certain (recommended) percentage of employees from ethnic minorities is enough to create a truly diverse atmosphere in an organization. Numbers approach of government's initiatives has thus invited criticism.

2.5 Policy versus Actualité

While the policies exist, their translation into actualité is questionable. Many books, including EOC (Equal Opportunities Commission) and CRE (Commission for Racial Equality) reports have succinctly raised the issue of discrimination in recruitment. 'There is ample evidence to suggest that those from minority groups continue to be treated unfairly and disadvantaged in the recruitment and selection process,' (Dale, 2003). Braham and Rhodes (1992) state that 'Access to particular jobs may be open to some and denied to others by a variety of stated and unstated reasons,' (Cited in: Clutterbuck et al, 2012, page 66)

The challenges that lie in the path of practical implementation are many faceted and deep rooted as discussed in several books and articles (Mulholland et al, 2010). Investigative reports have revealed 'worryingly disproportionate levels of unemployment amongst black and Asian workers despite their degree level qualifications,' (Healey, 2012). Many companies pay no more than lip service to their bogus affiliation to the concepts of equal opportunities and diversity by 'simply making formal policy declaration and seeking to avoid complaints of discrimination,' (Mulholland et al., 2006). In the face of this situation, it becomes difficult to distinguish between mere tokenism and true organizational commitment to diversity.

Even if at policy level and senior management, the organization's commitment to diversity is an honest one; the situation at middle level management can be drastically different where clichés about ethnicity can severely hamper efforts towards a diverse culture in an organization. As the majority of recruitment is done by middle level management the problem of biases on the basis of ethnicity is intensified. 'Such beliefs about the predominant characteristics of various ethnic groups can generate a considerable potential for discrimination when infused into job market situation,' (Holdaway, 2008).

'Current practices focus on equipping leaders and managers to address diversity and ignore individual contributors,' (Pollitt, 2006). To create an organizational culture of diversity, permeation of the concept across all levels of employees is of extreme importance. A focussed approach towards this goal can bridge the gap between policy and implementation.

In addition to the barriers in recruiting a diverse workforce, within many organizations there exists an additional barrier of limited upward movement or promotions. 'Perhaps the most obvious limitation on upward movement concerns appointment to supervisory and managerial posts,' (Mulholland et al., 2010). This limitation is commonly referred to as 'the glass ceiling'; the analogy of glass is drawn on the basis of its invisibility in the form of the lack of an organization's acceptance of its existence and restrictiveness in the form of stagnation of career growth. 'The glass ceiling is often used to describe the invisible barrier that women and ethnic minorities often face as they attempt to climb the corporate ladder,' (Ryan and Haslam, 2006).

In the light of the arguments by Canas and Sondak (2012) and Benhabib (2012), the phenomenon of 'the glass ceiling' is not a new one and has been discussed at length by several authors over a period of time. Its existence in an organization puts the onus on the management to recognize the barriers that exist and to ensure that methods are devised to break them. Morrison et al (1995) argues that 'the glass ceiling presents a challenge to organizations: that of identifying the barriers to the upward mobility of non traditional managers and implementing practices that successfully overcome these barriers' (Cited in: Janser and Junod, 2009, pp.163).

These books, articles and policy documents provide a theoretical understanding of the underlying issues and give a detailed account of problems of discrimination and suggest ways to overcome biases. While the issue has been exhaustively discussed from normative, sociological, psychological, policy and business perspectives; there is a surprising lack of actual ground research on the practical dimension of the subject so as to determine how and to what level of success Diversity initiatives are employed within a particular organization.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this project, the researcher seeks to measure the effectiveness of the 'recruiting for diversity' policy of businesses. One way of doing so could be analysing data put forth by businesses in the form of their annual reports, Corporate Responsibility (CR) reports, and information on their official websites. However, that would be a simplistic approach because in this context, associated with the question of 'how much' (percentage figures of employment by ethnicity) are the questions of 'how' (Positive Action), 'why' (benefits of a diversity culture) and 'what next' (future policies and tentative plans of the companies). The emphasis, here, is on 'the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency,' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Since the topic concerns recruitment, the researcher interviewed managers who play an active role in the recruitment process. Interviews have been favoured as a data collection method in social and business research for qualitative analysis of any phenomenon. In this study, semi structured, in depth interviews have been used by preparing a list of themes and questions to be covered and setting up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked' (Drever, 2003).

Interview participants work in NPower on managerial positions whereby they have a role to play in the recruitment process of the company. Due to the nature of their jobs and by virtue of their position, the interviewees had a wealth of experience in recruiting under organizational guidelines and were aware of company policies and initiatives on diversity. Data generated by these semi structured interviews formed the basis for theorising in this inductive research.

The methodology for this study, therefore, relies primarily on a qualitative approach and is complemented by quantitative evidence. In addition to these, useful information in books, journal articles, news articles, editorials from magazines and newspapers of considerable repute will be utilized for an enhanced understanding of the subject.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research have been stated in three main sections with subsequent sub-headings. The first section establishes the of NPower, outlines its policy, procedures and practice on Diversity in recruitment, and discusses the race sensitivity training for its employees. The second section attempts an evaluation of NPower's success in implementation of the policy in light of data provided by the organization. In this section, the researcher presents the differences between policy and practice, discusses the reasons behind the gap, and analyses them in the light of some serious allegations of institutionalized racism by one of the interview participants. organizational context.

4.1 Diversity in recruitment at NPower

NPower explicitly supports the discourse of Diversity in recruitment. The company's policy of 'fostering a diversity culture' is reverberated in its recruitment procedures as outlined by the Human Resource department.

4.1.1 Recruitment Process at NPower

The vacancies arising at different levels within the company are advertised on the company's website and are also registered with head hunters of good repute. Diversity link, referred to as 'open mindedness' in parentheses, on the web portal unequivocally states NPower's policy of welcoming applicants from diverse ethnic backgrounds. "A commitment to equal opportunities and diversity underpins all areas of our human resource management and policies, including recruitment and selection, remuneration and benefits, flexible working, and continuing personal and professional development" (NPower, 2015).

4.1.2 Race Sensitivity Training at NPower

Having understood that removal of biases is the key to achieving a fair selection procedure which in turn would strengthen Diversity initiatives; the crucial step is to implement race-sensitivity training at the organization. Clearly, the policy think-tank at NPower has worked in this direction. The company has regular Diversity and Inclusion workshop and all new employees benefit from some form of awareness training. At managerial level, the employees have powers to influence policy decisions and NPower organised workshops facilitated by an external adviser on diversity awareness to senior management. Also Diversity Action Groups (DAG) has updated all policies and guidelines that reflect the company principles.

4.2 Policy versus Actualité

With a clear and much publicised policy, cohesive and comprehensive training at management levels on a regular basis, and implementation of a systematic recruitment process designed to eliminate racial prejudice; it is fair to expect a successful and thriving practice of Diversity in recruitment at the organization. The question, that deserves a close scrutiny here, is—do the numbers add up?

4.2.1 Statistical Dimension

In its CR (Corporate Responsibility) report 2015, a breakdown of diversity as per employment category has been given.

**RWE NPower Staff by
Ethnicity**
December 2014

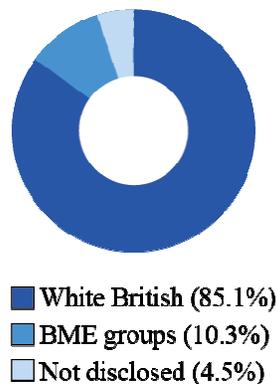


FIGURE 4.1

Source: Corporate Social Report, 2015

According to the latest available data of NPower (figure 4.1), the ethnic composition of its employees is on par with the 1:8 ratio recommended by the UK government.

RWE NPower Diversity in Senior Management Team

December 2014

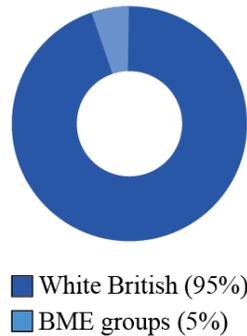


FIGURE 4.2

Source: Corporate Social Report, 2015

According to NPower CR report 2015, the ethnic composition of its senior management was 95 percent White British while BME groups accounted for the other 5 percent as illustrated in figure 4.2. This percentage division is markedly different from the overall figure and raises concerns about the presence of a glass ceiling or a bottle neck situation in career progress of BME group in the organization.

RWE NPower Diversity in Key Talent Group

December 2014

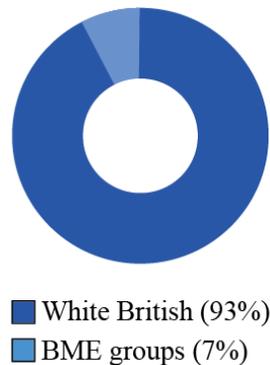


FIGURE 4.3

Source: Source: Corporate Social Report, 2015

Engineers and highly skilled employees are categorized under 'Key Talent Group' by NPower. Figure 4.3 illustrates the ethnic composition of employees falling under this criterion. Here too, the percentage of BME group barely touches the recommended government level. This raises concern about the commitment of the organization to 'fair selection'. The question, that needs to

be asked here, is whether it is mere coincidence that the number of deserving candidates from BME group is consistent with census percentage figures.

RWE NPower Diversity in Emerging Talent Group

December 2014

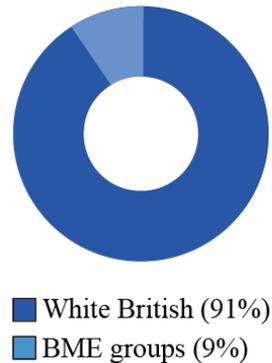


FIGURE 4.4

Source: Source: Corporate Social Report, 2015

NPower refers to its Graduate Recruits as 'Emerging Talent', the ethnic composition of whom is illustrated in figure 4.4. The percentage division on the basis of ethnicity under this category slightly exceeds the recommended employee composition figure.

Emerging Talent group is usually recruited by the company through career fairs in Universities. At Masters Degree level in UK universities, there is an overwhelming majority of international students. Keeping that in perspective, while a 9 percent BME composition is a commendable figure, the organization should be wary of congratulating itself too much on the basis of it alone.

4.3 Barriers in Diversity

These challenges and barriers emerged as focal points of discussion in all the interviews.

4.3.1 Glass Ceiling and Bottle Necks

In the light of statistical evidence from figure 4.2, it emerged that there are gaps in the execution of the policy. The interviews revealed that there is a perceptible lack of BME group applicants for senior management roles. This was cited as one of the major reasons behind a 'glass ceiling' situation within the organization, by some of the respondents, the 'glass ceiling' itself emerged as a contested notion in this research. While its existence in NPower was not confirmed by all the research participants, the fact that some did not entirely rule it out and discussed the issue at great length signifies that there is some level of problem within the organization.

4.3.2 Challenges in Managing Diversity

The workplace has become increasingly diverse, there has been a tension between the promise and the reality of diversity in team process and performance," (Mannix and Neale, 2007). The issues related to managing a diverse workforce emerged as focal points of discussion. Managers agreed that it was a difficult proposition to handle very diverse teams and that managers need to adapt to the needs of their team members in order to ensure efficient work within their teams. Language barriers, cultural clashes and lack of empathy emerged as various kinds of challenges that line managers face in the course of their work.

4.3.3 Stereotypes Based on Ethnicity

Another outcome from interviews with managers was cliché, stereotypes and assumption regarding abilities, nature and behaviour of people on the basis of their ethnicity poses another challenge in fostering diversity at NPower. These false presumptions cause the formation of groups within teams, and create a general feeling of dislike among colleagues. The findings confirmed the belief that challenges and barriers in diversity are manifold and multi-layered. The importance of minimizing if not completely eliminating them cannot be overemphasised.

4.3.4 Diversity Discourse and Equal Opportunities: the Legislative Dimension

The utmost problem in efficient implementation of Diversity policy is the ambiguity in the meaning of the two terms- Equal Opportunities and Diversity. Ambiguity in the concepts of Diversity and its falsely perceived similarity with Equal Opportunities discourse was important among other problems in the effective practice of the policy. Although, it seems like an insignificant issue caused by a small confusion, in practice, it can create a false sense of accomplishment in regard to Diversity when actually it is the regulation of Equal Opportunities that is being abided by. A surprisingly large number of people seem to confuse the two for one and the same policy.

This research brought about many important aspects of Diversity in organizational context and many challenges and barriers impeding its translation into practice. Benefiting from detailed interviews with research participants the researcher gained insight into several facets of the issue at hand.

5. CONCLUSION

From this research, it emerged that NPower is a conscientious company with a strong commitment to the discourse of diversity, and that its policy of 'actively fostering a diversity culture' is not mere lip service but a continually evolving and thriving practice. The company goes beyond mere tokenism by implementing the policy at many levels within the organization. The recruitment practices of NPower are in line with the legislative mandate as well as recommendations of the UK government to ensure the provision of Equal Opportunities and Diversity, and lend weight to claim of the organization of being a 'fair recruiter'.

Its proactive initiatives like Diversity and Inclusion intranet resources, regular staff training on race sensitivity, and formation of informal Diversity Action Groups have yielded results in the form of increased awareness on the subject. While on one hand, undergoing race sensitivity training is compulsory for all employees, on the other hand Diversity and Inclusion resources have been made available to all employees on intranet for reference and self-education purposes.

The formation of Diversity Action Groups as informal bodies, whereby the issues and concerns of employees regarding diversity can be addressed in an open atmosphere, has added another dimension to Diversity practices at NPower. In addition, there is a code of conduct called 'values and behaviours', defined by NPower, that embraces many aspects of diversity; the failure to follow which can result in being disciplined by the organization.

However, it also emerged that there are gaps in the execution of the policy. The interviews revealed that there is a perceptible lack of BME group applicants for senior management roles. This was cited as one of the major reasons behind a 'glass ceiling' situation within the organization, by some of the respondents, the 'glass ceiling' itself emerged as a contested notion in this research. While its existence in NPower was not confirmed by all the research participants, the fact that some did not entirely rule it out and one discussed the issue at great length signifies that there is some level of problem within the organization.

In addition to this, issues which related to managing a diverse workforce emerged as focal points of discussion. Managers agreed that it was a difficult proposition to handle very diverse teams and that managers need to adapt to the needs of their team members in order to ensure efficient work within their teams. Language barriers, cultural clashes and lack of empathy emerged as various kinds of challenges that line managers face in the course of their work. Ambiguity in the concepts of Diversity and its falsely perceived similarity with Equal Opportunities discourse was

important among other problems in the effective practice of the policy. Although, it seems like an insignificant issue caused by a small confusion, in practice, it can create a false sense of accomplishment in regard to Diversity when actually it is the regulation of Equal Opportunities that is being abided by.

Cliché, stereotypes and assumptions regarding abilities, nature and behaviour of people on the basis of their ethnicity poses another challenge in fostering diversity. These false presumptions cause the formation of groups within teams, and create a general feeling of dislike among colleagues. The research confirmed the belief that challenges and barriers in diversity are manifold and multi-layered. The importance of minimizing if not completely eliminating them cannot be overemphasised.

6. RECOMMENDATION

In the light of researcher's understanding of Diversity practices in NPower, based on his extensive reading on the subject and in-depth interviews with managers in the organization, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

6.1 Reaching Out

NPower has taken steps to ensure that its website and other literature explicitly state the organization's affiliation to Diversity discourse. Its policy of 'fostering a diverse culture' has been defined and discussed on its website under the heading of Corporate Responsibility. However, the interviews led the researcher to believe that there is a need for the organization to increase the visibility of its agenda and reach out to BME groups who are still hesitant in applying for managerial posts.

In addition, NPower can incorporate the element of 'actively fostering diversity' into its advertising campaigns. Not only will this enhance NPower's image as a fair recruiter, but also facilitate reaching out to diverse talent and encourage them to actively pursue a career in the company.

6.2 Lending a Hand

Interviews conducted by the researcher revealed that all employees working at NPower receive race sensitivity training and attend workshops. However, extended support in the form of continued training which is specific to the needs of managers handling a diverse team, and additional resources like literature covering cultural and country specific information, and budgetary allowance for holding casual fun events to encourage mixing up of the teams can make the task a little less challenging for them.

Ambiguity in the exact meaning and implications of Diversity presents another challenge in the path of its acceptance and practice. The research focused on the issue that Diversity is often, wrongly, confused with the discourse of Equal Opportunities; the danger being that employees may believe that they are actively fostering a diversity culture when providing equal opportunities to all. NPower must educate its employees on both the concepts with clear and comprehensive explanations and justification for their practical application in organizational context.

6.3 Breaking Barriers

Bearing in mind the commitment of NPower to the concept of Diversity, the allegations of glass ceiling for minority ethnics is a serious issue. In order to combat this problem, the organization should ensure monitoring and evaluation of the current situation. The disproportionate ratio of employees at senior level should be investigated; its reasons outlined in order to facilitate finding solutions for the same. Whether it is because of lack of BME group applicants or other reasons like prejudice; such a phenomenon has no place in a conscientious organization committed to Diversity and therefore, NPower should look into it at the earliest.

Encouraging informal gathering of staff members to encourage mixing of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds can help break barriers. NPower already has Diversity Action Groups in an informal capacity. However, developments within the Company could include the organization of events and parties wherein a conscious effort of making mixed race groups and arranging fun

activities of team building can be made, for example holding workshops with theatre-based games and exercises, and arranging karaoke nights with music from around the world . Small initiatives of informal nature with fun element can make people come together as friends, and help make prejudices melt away.

In the words of Maya Angelou, “We all should know that Diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their colour” (Agins, 2006).

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