



THE BENEFITS OF A MULTICULTURAL WORKFORCE
HOW CULTURAL DIVERSITY DRIVES SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Bachelor Thesis

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Objective of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to explore some of the benefits of having a multicultural workforce, and to examine how cultural diversity can contribute to the success of organisations. The thesis aims to analyse the impact of cultural diversity and how it can improve innovation, team performance and employee satisfaction in an organisation, as well as give the organisation a competitive edge. The thesis will review existing literature and conduct further qualitative or quantitative research in order to answer the following questions:

How does cultural diversity influence organisational outcomes?

What are the key drivers and challenges of managing a multicultural team?

How can companies effectively use diversity to enhance success and performance in the long-term?

Abstract

The world has become increasingly globalised over the last few decades. In this regard, the word *cultural diversity* has become increasingly prevalent and relevant. Thus, cultural diversity has become not only more common but also gives a competitive advantage to companies with regards to growth within an organisation and globally. This thesis will investigate some of the benefits of a multicultural workforce and examine how diversity can be a key factor in the success of the company, and why it is important for an organisation to incorporate a multicultural workforce in today's globalised world. The thesis will use a comprehensive review of academic literature, empirical data, as well as industry reports and case studies. It aims to explore the relationship between cultural diversity and key outcomes within organisations, such as innovation, employee satisfaction, collaboration, teamwork, and business performance.

The thesis will look at different leadership adaptations that should be used in order to drive a multicultural workforce to success, as well as different inclusive leadership approaches for overcoming cultural challenges and finding methods that can drive the entire team to success, such as effective communication styles and using different cultural norms to the team's advantage. It will also discuss human resource (HR) strategies that can be implemented to ensure long-term success, and policies that will ensure fair treatment for everyone within the organisation.

The findings suggest that when a multicultural workforce is well-managed, cultural diversity within teams will lead to more innovation, higher-performing teams, and a more dynamic and inclusive work environment. The organisations that actively try to find win-win solutions and not discriminate based on a cultural background are more likely to benefit from a wide range of perspectives, thus resulting in improved customer understanding, better adaptability, and higher success rates.

Key words

Keywords: Culture, Diversity, Organisation, Workforce, Multiculturalism, Business Performance, Human Resources, Leadership, Inclusion, Innovation.

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1. Introduction

This thesis will discuss the benefits of a multicultural workforce and how cultural diversity drives success in the workplace. In today's interconnected and globalised world, workplace diversity has become more and more common, and critical.

What is workplace diversity?

Workplace diversity refers to the presence of differences among the workforce and in this case, specifically in terms of cultural backgrounds, languages, nationalities, professional backgrounds as well as, in a lesser manner, gender. When an organisation manages diversity effectively, they can achieve many different benefits from enhanced innovation, better problem solving as well as higher employee satisfaction and fulfillment, allowing the organisation to reach a global level of competitiveness in the market.

Due to the fact that companies have started to increasingly extend their presence internationally, and operate in different countries and cultures simultaneously, more and more teams are composed of a workforce that comprise of people from different cultures, nationalities and companies worldwide. It has thus become essential to have a workforce, and teams at work that are made up of people from various cultures and nationalities. These multi-dimensional team members all bring different perspectives, problem solving skills and approaches to the table. Different companies and cultures also have different value statements, and if different people are included in teams, it could lead to not only different, but often better decision making processes. Obviously, these kinds of teams can also bring challenges related to communication and conflict resolution as well as the need for different leadership theories and dynamics. This typically requires the integration of different management strategies and value systems, which could lead to better management and success stories in the workplace.

The primary objective of this thesis is to explore the different benefits that can come from having a workforce constructed of multicultural employees and how that brings success to organisations. This will be defined by reviewing different leadership theories, case studies,

literature reviews as well as surveys of real work scenarios. The thesis research will not only look at the benefits but also the challenges that may be faced as well as the strategies that can be implemented to help leaders, organisations and managers effectively manage a multicultural workforce.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 explores the methodology, data sources and limitations of the research.

In chapter 3-5 I will look in more depth into the literature review, diversity and inclusion theories, challenges of managing this type of team as well as the impact of diversity.

In chapter 4 we will explore leadership adaptations, employee engagement and motivation, as well as the role of diverse teams.

In Chapter 5 there will be a deep dive into the best practices for managing a multicultural workforce, including inclusive leadership, diversity-positive workplace culture and HR strategies that can be integrated.

Lastly, in chapters 6 and 7 I will discuss the challenges and future perspectives, including the barriers to workplace diversity, the challenges of finding a method that works for the whole team, some future research directions and the evolution from multiculturalism to interculturalism. In chapter 7 I will conclude this thesis and provide some recommendations for organisations to incorporate.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design: qualitative literature review

This thesis uses a qualitative literature review as one of the primary research sources. The goal of the thesis is to explore and use existing research articles and knowledge on the topic of the benefits of multicultural workforce and explore how diversity drives success in organisations. Instead of collecting new hands-on data, the research will analyse already existing research papers systematically from a range of different reliable academic and professional sources, most of which are published research papers.

2.2 Data sources: academic journals, case studies, industry reports

The data was gathered from peer-reviewed academic journals, for example “The journal of Business Ethics”, “The Journal of Intercultural Management” and “The Organisational Dynamics” journal as well as the “Harvard Business Review” and “Career Management” which are practitioner oriented publications, citing industry insights like the workplace survey from Glassdoor (2020). These different sources include not only theoretical contributions, but also practical applications through case studies, different leadership theories and models, including some real life workplace surveys that provide practical insights into the topic.

2.3 Justification of approach

Using a qualitative literature review is a good method for this research paper because it allows for comprehensive understanding into multiple and ever-changing questions on diversity and inclusion. This method allows for comparison between findings and the identification of topics that frequently come up, such as innovation, multicultural team performance and leadership models and theories. This approach also allows for insight into the challenges and factors that lead to success while managing a multicultural team. By including academic theories with business practices, the research ensures an adequate balance between theoretical information and practical data, while staying relevant to the topic.

2.4 Limitations of research

Although this approach allows for a wide range of research it also has some limitations. Firstly, it relies on secondary data, which may introduce a certain bias because of the selective reporting, or of reporting that is in favor of diversity and drives the focus on the fact that diversity will bring positive outcomes to organisations.

Secondly, the contextual differences that can vary across countries, regions, industries and the organisations' size are a highly limiting factors and may generalise the findings. Due to the fact that limited empirical data was collected, real life dynamics and the evolution of workplace trends may not be fully factored in this research.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Defining Multicultural Workforces

3.1.1 Understanding Workplace Diversity

It has become more and more important to manage workforce diversity within the management theory and business practice, especially in the current globalized economy. Organisations are recognising the benefits of multicultural workforce but at the same time often struggle with the implementation thereof. They do however strive to create inclusive environments. One of the biggest areas where there are challenges is where companies want to implement policies, procedures and processes before thinking of their workforce as individuals first. True inclusion will come from evaluating, and respecting, the various norms, diversity, and differences that come from hiring a multicultural workforce. Only once all of these things are considered, can true diversity and inclusion begin to take place. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

3.1.2 Dimensions of Diversity

There are different dimensions of diversity, and although the big focus throughout this thesis will stay on Cultural Diversity, it is also worth mentioning that other types of diversity, like generational diversity, as well as professional diversity can play key roles

Cultural diversity can be described as being the differences in values, traditions and communication styles as well as different backgrounds and viewpoints because of the cultural differences. Generational diversity is more dependent on varied work expectations and perspectives because of the different types of age groups of workforce, and professional diversity is more focused on the differences in education, industry experience and overall skills.

During their research paper Pless and Maak (2004) argue that building an inclusive diversity culture requires a more structured approach that will include raising awareness, creating a vision of what inclusivity looks like and rethinking management principles in order to be more fitting with an inclusive workforce. This includes embedding inclusive behaviors into an organisation's Human Resource Management (HRM) systems as well as creating a foundation that

has a strong focus on trust, mutual understanding and recognition of effort; these elements are all essential for long term success. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

3.2 Diversity and Inclusion Theories

3.2.1 Theories on inclusive workplace cultures (Scott & Klein, 2022)

Diversity and Inclusions Theories by Scott and Klein (2022), argue that creating an inclusive workplace culture is something that is integral in order to enhance the performance of the organisation, the integration of various diverse leadership styles creates and fosters a work environment that encourages not only adaptability but also innovation and better decision-making abilities. Scott and Klein suggested that diversity in the workforce allows for wider and more in-depth perspectives allowing for more creativity and problem solving skills.

During their research Scott and Klein spoke of three traditional theoretical leadership theories, namely Authentic leadership theory, Distributed leadership theory and Transformational leadership theory. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

Transformational leadership is a style that elevates motivation as well as morality in both leaders and followers. It focuses on ethical aspirations and mutual support to achieve a common purpose. Research has shown that this method positively impacts innovation and organisational performance as well as adaptability. It also helps organisations to navigate change and to enhance performance in dynamic work environments. (Scott & Klein, 2022) This method partnered with a Multicultural workforce can be a recipe to bring great success to companies.

The role of Authentic leadership is a theory that combines positive psychology, ethical leadership as well as transformational leadership. It emphasizes a leader's self awareness as well as their ethics, transparency and genuine relationships. The idea is that authentic leaders should be resilient, look towards the future, or be future-oriented, as well as committed to the development of their workforce. Their credibility comes from the fact that they align their actions with their core values. The research has shown that authentic leadership becomes more real through life experiences and creating a trustful environment, especially during change. These types of leaders

are essential for uncertain times, rebuilding trust as well as creating sustainable success through ethical conduct and meaningful connections. All of which are essential when developing a multicultural workforce. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

Lastly, the role of Distributed Leadership theory emphasises the fact that leadership responsibilities are shared across individuals within an organisation contrary to just having a single leader to look to. The key principles include collaboration, openness, engagement at all levels, as well as reflection and flexibility or adaptability. This theory supports collective ownership as well as encouraging the wider involvement of staff and is specifically effective in complex work environments. This theory does not replace individual leadership but it complements it by not only promoting teamwork, but also shared accountability. Leaders of organisations adopting this kind of leadership model can enhance engagement, innovation and adaptability throughout their teams. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

Based on the above, one can derive that all of these different leadership models can be effective in a work environment that is attempting to, or are in the process of adopting a multicultural workforce. The organisation can use these different types of models throughout their organisation to test the effectiveness in different environments as well as with a workforce from different cultures.

3.2.2 The Business Case for Diversity

Nowadays, because the economy is international due to globalization, cultural diversity must be considered by any organisation as a key success factor. Almost all types of companies with international ambitions know that adapting their marketing theory and spending time to determine which products or services to market, in accordance with the culture of the target market, surely contribute to the success of sales and result growth. In their studies (Lorenzo and Reeves 2018) launched a survey to 1700 companies in 8 different countries in an attempt to analyse the link between company financial performance and diversity. Their study concluded that companies with a higher diversity index are more likely to have more innovation revenues. These are revenues on products that are on the market for less than 3 years. Their study put in correlation the diversity

index and the revenues and concluded that innovation revenue could increase by more than 12% if companies improved their diversity inclusion. As seen in the previous paragraph, diversity in the management can improve the leadership. However, diversity among employees can also improve innovation, and therefore enhance innovation revenues. (Rocio & Reeves, 2018)

Regardless of its industry sector and size, a successful company must adapt its offer to each targeted market. Cultural diversity is without a doubt a factor to consider for a company to have a successful internationalisation. Depending on the culture, some products or services may or may not be demanded in a market. Companies which make the effort to adapt their offers to cultural diversity are most likely to be successful and thus diversity of their team can help them innovate and adapt to international markets. (Rocio & Reeves, 2018)

3.3 Challenges of Managing a Multicultural Workforce

3.3.1 Cultural barriers and communication challenges

One of the key challenges in managing a multicultural workforce is navigating through the different cultural barriers that might impact the different team members as well as the team communication. Behfar, Kern and Brett (2006) in their research paper “Managing Challenges in Multicultural Teams” emphasise that misunderstanding in multicultural teams often come from different communication styles and differences in the communication norms, expectations as well as interpretations of other people’s behaviour. (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006)

In Multicultural teams these cultural differences can lead to different reactions such as confusion, tension and often misalignment within teams. This is often the case when some of the team members are not used to working in multicultural teams or when they are unprepared for the nuances and challenges that come from working in this kind of work environment. (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006)

Diversity brings the potential for a vaster range of perspectives and problem-solving skills. Behfar et al (2006) points out that these benefits are not automatic within a team, but instead diverse teams need to pay special attention to these challenges and work through additional layers of

complexity in order for the entire team to be onboard and understand each other and create a communication style within the team where everyone feels confident, respected and heard. Without deliberately addressing these efforts there is likely to be some cultural gaps within the team, and multicultural teams may struggle to collaborate effectively which makes it harder to reach their full potential and allow the organisation to reach its full success. (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006)

3.3.2 Strategies for effective team management

Facing teams that are increasingly more multiculturally diverse, in order to grow, organisations have to implement strategies that will allow for inclusion and teamwork. In the article Muddles and Huddles: Facilitating a Multicultural Workforce Through Team Management Theory by Evelyn Schreiber (1996) she outlines key strategies for managing diverse teams more effectively, putting an emphasis on the importance of participatory and cooperative work environments. Organisations need to make the shift from top-down structures to a more egalitarian approach. This method advocates for a “flatter” organisational structure which offers a compelling alternative to traditional top-down decision making. This method can help break some of the barriers and promote collaboration among diverse employees. (Schreiber, 1996)

Schreiber (1996) points out that business can learn very valuable lessons from researchers or academia where the research has focused on all of the challenges and complexities of multicultural workforce and group dynamics. A good example of this is in academic discussion around the sharing of power, as well as recognising different challenges such as outdated notions of assimilation or simple integration. A better and newer approach should be used such as one that not only accepts diversity within organisations, but actively looks for it and values all its benefits. Instead of fearing diversity, the organisation should embrace differences, and use it to its benefit (Schreiber, 1996)

Scheiber (1996) highlights the importance of creating a workplace structure that supports collective decision making instead of individual approaches, saying that successful teams are those that work together and have team objectives, rather than personal agendas, creating shared responsibility and cooperation within teams as well as the organisation. This highly aligns with the theory of team management. This method advocates for structures that promote participation and collaboration at the core of everything they do. By letting teams focus

on common objectives and fostering inclusivity, business can help make sure that the teams that are increasingly are empowered to contribute to collective success. (Schreiber, 1996)

It is also suggested by Scheiber (1996) that the application of pedagogical methods in team management is beneficial. This means that team managers directly become mentors who incorporate practices and training methods to achieve specific goals. The organisations can better prepare employees to navigate and appreciate cultural differences if they are well informed about them. The teaching methods that can be incorporated can include exercises and games that enhance cultural awareness, which in turn helps emphasize stronger teams as well as creating empathy between employees. (Schreiber, 1996).

4. Impact of Diversity on Organisational Success

4.1 Cultural Diversity and Innovation

Cultural diversity plays a big role in creating innovations within organisations. Employees with different cultural backgrounds that collaborate can bring varied perspectives as well as different problem-solving approaches. Their different outlooks and experiences can lead to creative solutions that can be richer and more diverse than if the problem was solved by people from similar backgrounds and situations. According to Jones et al, (2020), diverse teams are much more likely to challenge conventional thinking and drive innovative outcomes. This is mostly because exposure to different perspectives has taught them to encourage critical thinking and to explore ideas both new and old from different viewpoints. (Jones, Chirino Chace, & Wright, 2020)

4.1.1 The role of diverse teams in fostering creativity.

The more diverse the teams are, the more they are able to enhance creativity by offering a wider range of insights as well as reducing the likelihood of groupthink. The research done by Jones et al. (2020) suggest that organisations that have teams that are more culturally diverse, largely outperform homogenous teams when it comes to creative problem solving as well as adaptability to various citations. This is especially significant in industries that are highly dependent on innovation; such as marketing and technology where new and unique perspectives are a big contributor to product and development as well as customer engagement. (Jones, Chirino Chace, & Wright, 2020).

Diverse teams also improve communication as well as decision-making by using their different viewpoints and incorporating it. This can lead to well-rounded and effective solutions. Corporations that have employees from varied cultural perspectives allows for an environment that caters for more diverse consumer bases and enhances market relevance and business growth.

4.1.2 Case studies on successful diverse organisations

There are many different companies that have programs and initiatives in place to attract a multicultural and diverse workforce. In this regard, I have decided to take a more in-depth look into Ikea and their different initiatives and commitments towards cultural diversity.

Ikea is a global home furnishing retailer that was founded in July 1943 in Sweden. It has long integrated diversity and inclusion and incorporate it in their key performance objectives, meaning that it is an integral part of their corporate aspirations. As a company, Ikea recognises that embracing cultural diversity enhances their customer understanding and innovation. For that reason, they have implemented various initiatives in order to improve and create an inclusive environment for both their customers and their employees. Some of the key initiatives that they have implemented are the following:

Inclusive workplace environment:

Ikea in the UK and Ireland places an emphasis on creating a workplace where each individual employee feel both valued and included, no matter their background. Ikea's commitment is captured in their "Equal Everyday Commitment" program which focuses on seven different diversity areas.

The specific relevant areas to this thesis are:

- multiculturalism of ethnicity,
- inclusive of race, and
- inclusion of different nationalities

Ikea states specifically that caring for people and diversity & inclusion is embedded in their value system, and their vision for the company. They believe in creating a work environment where all co-workers can feel welcomed, respected, supported and well appreciated no matter what their cultural background is. (IKEA, n.d)

Ikea has also integrated a refugee integration program. Understanding the challenges that are faced by refugees, Ikea has initiated programs in order to support refugee integration into society. For example, in France they launched the "#VivreEtGrandirEnsemble" (live and grow together) program. This program aims to train and support 180 refugees over three years. By the end of 2023 Ikea surpassed this goal and managed to train 207 individuals in different roles ranging from logistics, food services and customer relations. This clearly shows their commitment to giving

individuals from different backgrounds the chance to make a living in a foreign country, even though it might not always be the refugee's country of choice. (IKEA, n.d)

Ikea has also partnered with organisations worldwide to create global collaborations in order to promote cultural diversity. For example, in Jordan, Ikea collaborated with the Jordan River Foundation in order to co-create certain textile products with local and refugee women in order to blend traditional Jordanian weaving techniques into their modern designs. Not only did Ikea employ a multicultural workforce and give jobs to people highly in need **thereof**, but they also used the opportunity to make the company more innovative and successful, as a consequence. (IKEA, n.d)

In this regard, Ikea also created Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). This initiative supports diverse employee communities that focus on various cultural identity groups. The different groups provide a platform for employees to offer their support, share their experience and create a social environment where employees can feel less isolated in their situation, and more supported. The ERGs also drive initiatives that promote inclusivity within Ikea which further makes the program successful. (IKEA, n.d)

By implementing these different initiatives and programs, Ikea's dedication to cultural diversity has led to not only a more inclusive workplace, but it has also improved employee satisfaction and also added products that resonate more closely with a global customer bases. It follows that it also made Ikea financially more successful. By valuing diverse perspectives and creating win-win situations, Ikea continues to innovate and adapt to the needs of both their employees and their diverse clientele making it an overall win-win situation. (IKEA, n.d)

4.2 Leadership Adaptations

4.2.1 Key leadership traits for managing diversity

There are a few key leadership adaptations that can be focused on in order to manage diverse teams better.

The research paper Advancing Traditional Leadership Theories by Incorporating Multicultural and Workforce Diversity Leadership Traits, Behaviors, and Supporting Practices: Implications for Organisational Leaders by Scott & Klein (2022) suggested the different adaptations below.

4.2.1.1 Commitment to diversity & diversity initiatives:

The leaders of an organisation must show strong and sustainable commitment to diversity, not only with their words but also with their actions. They can do this by dedicating significant financial and workforce resources to diversity initiatives. The leader's commitment should be highly engraved in the organisation's mission and values in order to ensure that diversity remains at the core of the organisation's priority. Long term diversity objectives should be shown in order to create inclusive practices that benefit all of the employees. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

4.2.1.2 Self-awareness and self work:

The leaders of the organisation have to engage in ongoing self-work in order to understand their own perspectives and opinions on diversity. Being self-aware will help leaders to better manage their different interactions and decision making processes within a diverse team, which could contribute to making these interactions more successful. Regularly reflecting on diversity and the organisation's and leader's engagement towards a diverse outlook is necessary to maintain an effective role in leading a multicultural workforce. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

Inclusion of diversity in organisational strategies:

The main stakeholders and leaders of an organisation should integrate diversity into the core strategic objectives of the organisation, inclusive behaviour should be modeled from the top-down to ensure that this diverse mindset is embedded in all aspects of the organisation's development, from leadership structures to hiring strategies.

Adaptability and Flexibility:

Good leaders in a multicultural organisation should be able to easily adapt and be flexible in their leadership approaches. As the workforce they manage become more diverse, the leaders have an obligation to be open to changing their existing practices, communication styles as well as norms, in order to accommodate the new workforce's perspectives and styles. The flexibility from

the leader will allow an organisation to remain open, responsive and effective in a changing dynamic and diverse work environment. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

4.2.2 Cross-cultural leadership models

In the globalised and more diverse culture in today's work environment, cross-cultural leadership is becoming a crucial part of every organisation's management system, in order for the organisation to succeed or to remain successful. More traditional leadership models are often shortcoming when applied to multicultural teams which forces leaders, organisations, and managers to explore different models to better incorporate cultural intelligence and leadership styles that can be adapted.

Scott & Klein (2022) in their research article about advancing traditional leadership theories provide some ideas. By advocating for the evolution of traditional leadership theories, they argue that in the ever-changing world, it is a necessity that leadership theories and models include multicultural leadership traits and supporting practices. This emphasises that effective leadership in a diverse work environment will require not only awareness of different cultural norms but also the integration of a global mindset and inclusive decision-making, directly into the leadership behaviours. They argue that an organisation's leaders should be trained and developed to fill cultural gaps and harness the diversity in their teams into a strategic advantage. (Scott & Klein, 2022)

In their research paper "Managing Challenges in Multicultural Teams" Behfar, Kern and Brett (2006) explored the practical challenges that were faced by leaders of multicultural teams. In the research they pointed out different issues in these kinds of teams such as miscommunications, conflicting norms as well as different expectations from the leaders and managers or authority. They highlight the importance for leaders to adapt more task-oriented leadership styles as well as explicit communication styles and strategies. They argue that these things are key for navigating a multicultural team in order to smoothly go through misunderstandings that come from cross-cultural management. Their research findings show the importance for leaders to adapt their management approach, based on the cultural context that their multicultural workforce teams are constructed of. (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006)

4.3 Employee Engagement and Motivation

4.3.1 Impact of diversity on job satisfaction and productivity

According to the Glassdoor survey on diversity inclusion, workspace diversity and inclusion are important factors for jobseekers when they choose to apply for a job in a company. In fact, more than 3 out of 4 jobseekers consider it an important factor when replying to job offers. There are many reasons for applicants to consider diversity in a company while applying and not just to feel better. Evolving in a business environment that welcomes diversity has more than one benefit. (Glassdoor Team, 2020) During this survey by Glassdoor it shows that there are different factors being taken into account (Glassdoor Team, 2020):

- Diversity importance: 76% of employees and job seekers value a diverse workforce when evaluating different job offers.
- Discrimination: A big amount of black (47%) and Hispanic (49%) employees have quit jobs due to discrimination compared to only (38%) of white employees.
- Transparency and action: 71% of black and 72% of Hispanic employees believe that the organisation they work for need to do more to improve diversity, and overall 32% of employees do not apply for jobs at companies that lack diversity with higher rates among black (41%) employees.

Jinsoo Terry (2007), in his research paper motivating a multicultural workforce, argues that having diversity in a team can increase both job satisfaction as well as productivity, on condition that the team is managed well. Having a multicultural workforce opens doors to different communication styles, work expectations, norms, different expectations from leaders as well as different value systems. If not well managed, these differences can become the reason for conflict and disengagement in teams, but if well managed it can be the reason the team is highly motivated, with a strong team collaboration, resulting in improved outcomes. (Terry, 2007)

Culturally aware leadership models and inclusive practices increase the employees' sense of belonging and respect, which directly improves job satisfaction, according to Terry (2007). When

there is a minimum of misunderstanding in the team and the employees feel understood and heard in their work environment, individual engagement as well as trust will grow within the team.

A well-managed multicultural workforce brings more diverse perspectives and problem-solving approaches, which in return will increase the creativity, innovation and decision-making within the team.

But, if the managers and leaders do not address the misunderstandings and “unconscious bias” in the teams, this will reduce collaboration and lead to less performance in the team. Leaders should be trained to lead multicultural teams effectively, which in return will unlock innovation, creativity and productivity within the teams. (Terry, 2007)

“The greatest impact on motivation and performance comes not from diversity itself, but from how leaders respond to it.” Terry (2007)

4.3.2 Strategies for maintaining an inclusive environment

Below are some strategies for maintaining an inclusive environment

- Leadership Commitment
 - Leaders should lead by example and model the behaviour they expect.
 - They should set clear goals and track progress.
 - They should involve diverse voices in holding them accountable. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)
- Diverse Hiring Practices
 - Recruitment should be done on a bias-free basis, and
 - There should be a mix of backgrounds in hiring teams. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)
- Inclusive Policies and Benefits
 - Policies should be non-discriminative, and

- Different employee needs such as healthcare, parental support, and needs for people with disabilities must be considered and met, where possible. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)
- Training and Education
 - Regular workshops on unconscious bias, and other areas of diversity should be held to teach employees how to work respectfully across cultures and backgrounds. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)
- Inclusive Communication
 - Inclusive language in multiple formats should be used and provide info in different translations.
 - Diverse holidays such as cultural and religious observances should be recognised. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)
- Regular Feedback and Accountability systems should be put in place.
- Belongingness and Safety should be promoted where employees are encouraged to share their experiences without fear and knowing that their contributions will be recognised in a collaborative and respectful team culture. (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018)

5. Best Practices for Managing a Multicultural Workforce

5.1 Inclusive Leadership and Team Management

5.1.1 Approaches for overcoming cultural challenges

Based on the research paper “Building an Inclusive Diversity Culture” by Pless and Maak (2004) they argue that effective management of a multicultural workforce requires different integrative approaches that go way beyond simply recruiting people with different Nationalities and diversities. Simply put, diversity is much more than merely recruiting diverse talent. Pless and Maak (2004) outlines some best practices that hinge on fostering a more inclusive leadership style, as well as building teams that use their differences and turn it into value and leverage. This section explores some key practices that are derived from their framework and specifically focuses on both strategic processes as well as everyday behaviour that will enable organisations to overcome certain cultural challenges.

5.1.2 Decision making based on inclusivity and participatory leadership

An essential pillar of creating an inclusive work environment is participatory decision making. Participatory decision making involves the process of decision making by involving multiple stakeholders instead of relying only on top-down directives. This enhances and promotes inclusiveness, shared ownership, trust and better problem solving.

By involving multiple voices into the different critical decisions made within an organisation, the organisations can expand their knowledge base, enhance their problem-solving capabilities as well as incorporate wider stakeholder commitment. Pless and Maak (2004) argue that involving a wide range of different perspectives can not only increase trust and legitimacy between both internal and external stakeholders, but it can also be a key factor in long term success and performance improvements. (Pless & Maak, 2004).

An example of this can be the adaptation of stakeholder dialogue. This is where different representatives from different cultural and professional backgrounds are included in the process. It helps to ensure that the decisions are based on the strength of reasoned arguments, instead of imbalances that can come from top-down decision making. This is a way where everyone can be

represented, and everyone can feel the decision making is fair and takes into account the needs of all of the stakeholders and workforce.

5.1.3 Developing Inclusive Teams.

To recruit and develop a Multicultural workforce, it is important to note that it requires more than just assembling a group of diverse individuals or just recruiting someone because they have a different nationality than the rest of the team. It demands of the leaders to put in deliberate effort to build processes within the team that accommodate different communication styles, cultural norms as well as behavioral expectations. The leader should also look for the different skills and communication styles that they think are still missing from the team and try to recruit according to team needs. (Pless & Maak, 2004) Inclusive teams can be categorised by these different characteristics:

Open & Frank communication:

This is when open and forthright communication is encouraged. Dialogues of this nature are valued when it is accompanied by active listening and the respectful integration of different perspectives and viewpoints.

Participative problem solving:

This is the process of involving other team members in the decision-making process. It not only includes a wider range of expertise, but it also lessens and weakens the risk of a small political barrier between leadership and the team.

Ongoing relationship building:

Composing a team that is stable and incorporating team building initiatives that develop a trust mindset in the team, allows for ongoing relationship building within a team. Pless & Maak (2004) illustrated that when team members are given space to adjust their communication styles to that of the team, for example when culturally specific norms are accommodated, mutual recognition and learning can be created within the team and thus the team will be able to flourish. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

Creating a work life balance and mutual respect:

Another part of inclusive leadership is also recognising employees as unique individuals. This incorporates the fact that these employees have responsibilities both in and out of the workplace. Incorporating things into the work environment, like flexible work arrangements, support for personal commitments and job sharing, all help to cultivate an environment where employees will feel respected and valued beyond just their immediate work output. In turn this will build trust within the team and encourage individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute authentically to the team. This will strengthen team cohesion and commitment to the organisation. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

Overcoming cultural challenges:

Overcoming the various cultural challenges in a diverse workplace is an ongoing process. There are many different sides to the process and many different challenges to overcome. One can derive that there is a multifaceted process to overcome. The approach that Pless and Maak (2004) suggest overcoming these challenges involve numerous steps:

Raising awareness and building understanding:

The organisation must invest in continuous education and reflection workshops that challenge the already existing assumptions or generalisations about certain cultural norms. This will promote cultural sensitivity. (Pless & Maak, 2004) If the employees from the different cultures are up to it, they can even create an interactive workshop in order to raise awareness about certain cultural assumptions, thereby creating trust within the team.

Developing a shared vision:

A clear inclusiveness vision should be created by all of the different stakeholders. This will set a direction for transformative change within the organisation.

Rethinking key management concepts:

Traditionally management practices often favor authoritative decision making. The organisation can transition to a more inclusive model that requires re-evaluation and thereafter

adapting different practices to support not only mutual recognition but also shared leadership. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

Implementing Integrated systems:

Another process to put in place is the alignment of HRM processes like recruitment, development, evaluation and reward. If these different competencies of inclusion are implemented, it ensures that inclusive practices are not only advocated but also systematically rewarded. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

5.2 Diversity-Positive Workplace Culture

5.2.1 Case studies on diversity-driven success

During the research paper Diversity and Inclusion - Help Drive Business Success by Angela Peacock (2018), Peacock emphasises that driving and fostering a diversity-positive workplace culture has many benefits. Not only is it beneficial, but it is a necessity for business success. Throughout her work with different global insurance companies, she provides real life insights into how organisations are transitioning from surface-level diversity into deep sustainable inclusive practices. (Peacock, 2018)

One very compelling example involves a traditional insurance company that acquired a financial technology (fintech) startup in order to drive digital disruption. In the beginning the organisation split the fintech team into a more isolated space in order to “protect” them from the corporate environment. This approach backfired badly for the company, although their initial intentions were noble. This approach was a symbol of exclusion instead of integration. Peacock (2018) points out that this was a critical misstep on the part of the insurance organisation to achieve true innovation requires embedding diverse thinking within every part of the organisation and within the core of the organisation, instead of sidelining it. (Peacock, 2018)

Creating this type of inclusive culture means engaging all of the employees, which includes the employees that may feel threatened by initiatives that have to do with diversity, oftentimes associated with middle aged white managers, according to Peacock (2018). The importance of transparent and ongoing conversations is stressed throughout her paper. This includes practical

inclusion metrics that go far beyond demographics. The suggested strategies include training managers to recognise the role they play in inclusion, incorporating inclusive behaviour into their performance evaluations as well as using internal storytelling. One example of this can be to have podcasts between employees in order to share life experiences and drive change within the organisation. (Peacock, 2018)

The research demonstrates that diversity-driven success does not hinge on isolated programs, but rather on a shift in organisational culture, systems that include measuring inclusion inputs, empowering learning as well as embedding inclusive values into everyday business operations. (Peacock, 2018)

5.3 Human Resource (HR) Strategies

5.3.1 Training programs, policies, and mentorship initiatives

A thorough HR strategy is essential to foster an inclusive and diverse work environment. Organisations can achieve this by aligning their training programs, mentorships initiatives as well as their policies with the values of inclusiveness. An element that is essential for this strategy to work is to engrave inclusiveness within the organisation's Human Relations Management (HRM) system as noted when discussing the topic of overcoming cultural challenges. Embedding this into the HRM system will involve more than one core component. These components are discussed below: (Pless & Maak, 2004)

5.3.2 Embedded Inclusiveness in HRM Systems:

Recruitment:

Recruiting the right candidates for the organisation to have a diverse workforce goes beyond just targeting diverse candidates. The recruitment strategies that should be put in place should assess whether the potential employees share the same values as the organisation regarding inclusiveness. Using a competency-based selection method such as structured interviews and assessment centers can enable the organisations to evaluate whether or not a candidate shows signs of inclusive behavior from the beginning.

Performance Evaluation:

Traditional performance evaluations often have a high focus on outcomes. With regards to diversity and inclusiveness, but in this case one should create a culture that values other performance measures such as ethical and inclusive practices as well. It is very important to integrate behavioral criteria in these evaluations that link directly to inclusiveness. The organisation should measure not only what is achieved but also how it was achieved. In other words, was it achieved through collaboration, respect and inclusiveness? Managers can reinforce desired behaviour and encourage an environment where inclusive practices are the new norm. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

Reward and compensation:

The reward systems that are in place can further promote inclusiveness when elements of an employee's compensation such as their salary and bonuses are directly impacted by their demonstration of inclusive behaviours. This type of approach provides material for recognising inclusive practices and ensures that the companies' values of diversity and inclusion is engraved across the entire organisation.

5.3.3 Integrating HR strategies with the development initiatives:

Training programs:

Specialised training programs that are created for the company's needs can improve intercultural effectiveness, as well as raise awareness on what type of behaviour is seen as inclusive behaviour. The different workshops or programs can cover a vast number of topics such as effective communication in a diverse environment, conflict resolution as well as ethical behaviour and ethical leadership. Integrating regular workshops on these topics as well as follow up modules for the questions asked in the initial workshops will help reinforce the competencies and inclusive behavior. Creating these competencies will ensure that employees continue to learn and grow in the subject and develop skill sets on the topic that are in line with the companies' values. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

Policies:

The policies that are created within the organisation must support the inclusiveness behaviour and the application thereof. This includes creating new policies that encourage diverse recruitment as well as mandating inclusive practices in performance evaluations, promotions and day to day management. These policies should apply to everyone within the company. The policies should be

clear and communicated throughout the organisation. These policies will set the standard for behaviour within an organisation as well as create accountability within the organisation from top management to employees. (Pless & Maak, 2004)



Figure 1. Multicultural Workforce Diagram.

Mentorship Initiatives:

Mentorship programs are also an effective way to implement the policies into practice. Employees should be paired with experienced mentors. By doing this, organisations can promote knowledge transfer, career development as well as a deeper understanding of inclusive practices. Mentorship programs can help to break down top-down management barriers and create an environment of mutual respect, as well as ongoing learning. (Pless & Maak, 2004)

By implementing these HR strategies that are founded with a focus of creating inclusiveness in HRM systems, organisations are better equipped to cultivate a work environment that will not only attract diverse talent but also support their growth and thus create an environment where employees are more likely to thrive and stay. This will also encourage inclusive behaviour with an end result that will drive sustainable long-term success within the organisation.

A multicultural and diverse workforce can visually be illustrated as per Figure 1, where it is shown how inclusive practices can progress from inclusive leadership, to finding the appropriate

communication style, and right down to HR Management. It shows how the above can lead to innovation, collaboration and employee satisfaction, ultimately leading to increased success within the organisation.

6. Discussion, challenges and future opportunities

In addition to your findings being presented, they also need to be discussed to illustrate how they contribute to theory and practice. This involves highlighting the contributions of your work to the related research domain and stating the limitations of your work.

6.1 Barriers to workplace diversity

Behfar, Kern & Brett (2006) in their research paper *Managing Challenges in Multicultural Teams* explain that although there are many advantages to workplace diversity, it can also introduce several challenges that might prevent team performance and inclusion. The biggest challenges and barriers normally come from miscommunication, and it is often caused by the differences in language use, rating from nonverbal cues, cultural norms, vocabulary and the way that people express their words. Many multicultural teams are prone to misunderstanding if it is not addressed from the get-go. Because of their varying communication styles, expectations, and workplace environment expectations this often leads to conflict and reduced trust. (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006)

An important topic to address is work values, and decision-making approaches. This often creates friction, as team members have contrasting views on hierarchy, time management and how to collaborate. This could make it difficult to align between goals and processes. If the leaders are not aware of the barriers that multicultural teams are prone to, the differences can quickly escalate into conflict as well as disengagement from team members.

Bias and stereotyping are constant barriers that need to be faced in multicultural teams. Employees that come from minority backgrounds have high chances of facing unfair assumptions about their limitations or abilities as well as limitations regarding getting promoted to leadership positions. These experiences are also a contributing factor to feelings of exclusion and disengagement in team members. (Pless & Maak, 2004).

6.2 The evolution from multiculturalism to interculturalism

According to Gross-Golacka and Martyniuk (2024) in their research paper on Globalisation and the Challenges of Managing Cultural Diversity: From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism, there should be a shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism in response to the challenges posed by globalisation and managing cultural diversity within organisations. Multiculturalism is traditionally centered around allowing different cultures to exist side by side, but it often leads to separation between groups with less intercommunication, as a consequence. For that reason, companies are now moving away from just multiculturalism and moving towards interculturalism. (Gross-Golacka and Martyniuk, 2024)

Interculturalism allows and encourages people from different backgrounds to talk, work and learn together and from each other. This method creates a more inclusive approach and creates even stronger teamwork, more creativity and a better social environment at work. Gross-Golacka et al (2024) show that interculturalism is the new norm and works better in global companies. As with other methods, it requires strong leadership and many resources from the organisation in order to be successful.

The above shows the new way of thinking about diversity and the future that it can provide, as well as further research that needs to be done on this topic. This model focuses more on real interaction and is the future perspective that organisations can look at once they have managed to successfully employ multicultural workforce principles and theories that were discussed in parts 3-5. (Gross-Golacka & Martyniuk, 2024).

6.3 Challenges of finding a method that work for a whole team, one does not fit all

Johnson (2015) in his research paper “Engaging a Multigenerational and Multicultural Workforce: One Style does not Suit all” points out an important challenge. The challenge is that engaging in a multicultural and generational workforce requires an approach that is tailored to the team and each specific individual’s needs. The team needs a communication style that is tailored to their needs because there is no single style that is effective for everyone. Each culture and generation is different in their needs and have distinct preferences of how they would like to receive information. (Johnson, 2015) For example:

Baby boomers want more personal communication and involvement. They prefer face to face discussion, and they want clear respect for hierarchy from everyone else. Generation X tends to respond better to rationale-based communication, and they look for logic as well as clarity and independence in their messaging. Generation Y (Millennials) tend to be more engaged through technologically driven communication, with preferences for things such as digital tools, instant feedback and interactive formats. (Johnson, 2015)

The same principles apply to different cultures. There are different preferences varying from culture to culture although some of the same ones can apply depending on the generation. In this regard, one must keep in mind that some cultures are ahead in technology and for that reason, the generational preferences can vary. (Johnson, 2015)

The above shows that the “one-size-fits-all” method that many organisations try to incorporate can cause disengagement from parts of the team, which can lead to miscommunication, disengagement and/or conflict. In order to overcome this barrier, organisations need to adapt their communication and engagement theories and strategies in order to match the diverse needs and expectations of the teams.

6.4 Future research directions

There are many different topics that can be relevant and interesting for future research directions on this topic. Some that seem relevant are the following:

Digital multicultural teams and remote working, or working from home: During and after the Covid19 Pandemic, working remotely, working from home or hybrid working conditions have become more common. In certain organisations it has become the norm. Understanding how cultural diversity plays out in this environment with digital teams, and how leaders can effectively manage these kinds of teams is crucial. Future research can explore how communication styles as well as inclusion and collaboration are impacted because of the virtual environment, and also if the team is international.

Further research into progressing from Multiculturalism to Interculturalism: A further research direction would be to build on evolving and newer concepts like interculturalism. The research should examine how companies can go beyond representation of a multicultural team into real

integration and interaction between the cultures, which will help create truly inclusive and collaborative workplaces. This can explore whether the same concepts work in remote teams as those that work in in person teams.

Further research is needed with regard to the career paths of culturally diverse employees, and how they can progress to leadership positions:

Although many organisations have gotten on board with recruiting employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, many companies still do not place these employees in leadership positions. Research should explore how organisations can support diverse employees into moving into management and leadership positions. The research should include how mentorship programs can assist in this regard and what strategies can be put in place to develop culturally diverse employees to progress into a leadership role later on in their career.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis pointed out the numerous benefits of having a multicultural workforce, and highlighted the role it plays in driving creativity, innovation and success within an organisation.

It was established that teams that are diverse bring different perspectives and promote innovation and better problem-solving skills. This, in return, increases the overall performance. Furthermore it highlighted that often, one of the keys to unlocking the true potential of the team is leadership. The right leaders as well as the right leadership strategies and theories need to be put in place. Effective leadership can make or break the success of a multicultural team within an organisation. Leaders need to be able to adapt to different situations and be culturally aware of themselves. Successfully managing a diverse team and creating a team environment of inclusiveness can promote more job satisfaction and productivity.

Based on these different findings there are several theories, strategies and practices that can be recommended to organisations. Some of these are the following: to implementing diversity training programs and having regular interactive workshops on the topic. These programs should aim to raise awareness and improve communication within the teams.

In addition, organisations need to invest time and money in developing leaders that practice inclusiveness, respect the cultural differences of their employees and promote and enforce cross-cultural collaboration.

Organisations should also implement HR policies that allow for diverse needs and mentorship, and programs that will support talented in the workforce no matter their cultural background. This will create an inclusive and supportive environment within the organisation's culture.

This paper contributes to already existing research papers and literature by looking at theoretical concepts and also providing some suggestions and solutions. There are some theories and also practical strategies and solutions that organisations can start implementing straight away to integrate multicultural teams and diversity into their organisations. There are also some ideas on how to effectively manage intercultural teams. The research builds on other research papers from

peers like Pless & Maak (2004) and Scott & Klein (2022) that offers an overview of how diversity can directly influence success within organisations.

Future studies could explore many different areas as noted in part 6. As this is a topic that is important in everyday life and becoming more and more important as years go by, there are still many areas to be discovered on this topic and there is still ample areas for research. Research on this topic started as early as 1996 (Scheiber (1996)) where the research showed that cultural diversity is an important topic within teams. Now, in 2025, the topic is still relevant, and even more so to our everyday life with technology and remote working, opening many different topics and further research paths to be discovered.

This thesis set out to explore three core questions namely: (1) how cultural diversity influences organisational outcomes, (2) what key drivers and challenges exist in managing multicultural teams, and (3) how organisations can strategically harness diversity to enhance long-term success. Through an in-depth literature review and real-world case analyses, it became clear that cultural diversity, when well-managed, enhances innovation, collaboration, and employee satisfaction - ultimately driving competitive advantage. The research identified inclusive leadership, adaptable communication strategies, and embedded HRM practices as important drivers, while highlighting miscommunication, unconscious bias, and one-size-fits-all approaches as key barriers. By linking theoretical insights with practical strategies, this thesis not only reinforced the value of diversity but also offered actionable frameworks to help organisations transform multicultural dynamics into sustained success.

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Figure 1.- Multicultural Workforce Success Diagram.25

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Natania Bester