Chapter 6

Integrating Multiculturalism in the Design and Implementation of Work– Life Balance Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has affected the outlook of contemporary workforce through migration by introducing multiculturalism. Customary work-life balance strategies (WLBS) are not adequate in addressing work-family challenges faced by employees in the 21st century. This chapter furthers literature on the integration of multiculturalism in the design and implementation of WLBS to address the needs of employees in multinational corporations. A concise review of previous studies on multiculturalism and work-life balance was carried out. This chapter submits that WLBS do not address the issues of multiculturalism in managing each group challenges in accordance with their cultural backgrounds; therefore, most of these WLBS are not achieving the objectives for which they were adopted. The review of literature also noted the existence of traditional WLBS and emerging non-traditional interventions. The managerial implication of this chapter hinges on adoption of pragmatic strategies to address multiculturalism in the design and implementation of WLBS.

INTRODUCTION

The demographics of the 21st century workplace is increasingly becoming multicultural globally. Shifts in global markets and economies have resulted in high migration rates among skilled workforce, leading to multiculturalism in the workplaces. A multicultural workforce is a labour force that comprises of workers from numerous cultural backgrounds. It is characteristically distinctive and comprises of individuals from various cultures, which resultantly stimulates creativity in the workplace (Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2017) and complicates design of strategic interventions. Some of the distinguishing traits among individuals in a multicultural workplace are age, ethnic background, race, socioeconomic status, political association and sexual orientation, psychological and physiological abilities/disabilities (Rivera, 2016).

With all its prospects, multicultural workplaces have attendant challenges especially in the area of Human Resource Management (HRM). Communication challenges often arise because of misunderstanding from differences in language between supervisors and subordinates (Chan, Javed, Lyu, Hon & Wong, 2016). One of the negative outcomes arising from this is stress and breakdown in interpersonal relationships at work (Abe & Mason, 2016). Addressing the challenges in this case will require strategic dynamism like translating instructions and responsibilities in various major languages or employing supervisors and/or subordinates with basic understanding of dominant languages used in the workplace. Similarly, tailoring WLBS to address the pertinent and pressing needs (stressors) of various multicultural groups in a workplace is significant.

Fleetwood (2007) in Ali, Malik, Pereira, and Ariss (2017) reports that one of the reasons for discussing WLBS was to assist female employees to cope with childcare responsibilities, but implemented WLBS often include men. The argument has shifted from nurturing to caregiving by both the male and female employees, although; childcare role has continued to be predominantly attributed to women. This implies that men may shun the use of the childcare policies even if they are single parents because of cultural inclinations. Organisations need to adjust to changing multicultural landscape in adopting strategies to assist employees in managing their work and family related challenges. Such WLBS that succinctly address employee work and family challenges need to be formulated with the multicultural nature of the workplace in mind. Curly (2016) echoes this in his recommendation that organisations need to adopt more flexibility in their human resource strategies with regard to certain characteristics including the kaleidoscopic demographics of the workplaces. Workplaces that do not have this flexibility in consideration could encounter issues in employing and retaining a diverse labour force. Where this happens, the organisation stands to lose incomes and incur increase in costs

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