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WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN THE TELECOMMUNICATION SECTOR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Workforce diversity refers to inclusion of workforce from a broad spectrum of religious, cultural, experiential and environmental backgrounds. It refers to more than merely tolerating and accepting the existence of diversity, it is imperative to understand diversity, celebrate and inculcate it in the daily functioning of organisations and eradicate discrimination of all types in this regard. A balanced and diverse workforce is a vital part of organisation culture as it promotes a healthy relationship among people of different cultures thereby impacting the work environment, productivity and motivation levels of the employees as well as ensuring varied perspectives, opinions and solutions. The purpose of this research paper is to understand the level of diversity in the telecommunication sector of India which is experiencing record growth level .Diversity in this sector has been significantly improving with the average male-female workforce ratio growing significantly in managerial roles and positions where women are being encouraged to take up the mantle of responsibility in various spheres of the business in addition to companies stressing upon the importance and need for gender diversity and its subsequent impact on their operations globally

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management: Human resource refers to the skills, knowledge and abilities of employees, employer an trade unions of an organisation as well as their ethics, values and beliefs. Management deals with the functions of planning, organising, directing and controlling of resources. Hence, Human Resource Management refers to the process of managing through functions such as planning, organising, directing and planning human resources in terms of their skills, knowledge and abilities through functions such as recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal etc., to achieve individual an organisational objectives.

Workforce Diversity: Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. "Diversity" means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. Diversity is a set of conscious practices that involve:

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- Understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.
- Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own.
- Understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing;
- Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others;
- Building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.

Telecommunication Sector in India

India is currently the second-largest telecommunication market and has the third highest number of internet users in the world. It is also the second largest country in terms of internet subscribers. The country is now the world's second largest smartphone market and will have almost one billion unique mobile subscribers by 2020. India's telecommunications

market is expected to experience further growth, fuelled by increased non-voice revenues and higher penetration in rural market. Telecom penetration in the nation's rural market is expected to increase to 70 per cent by 2017. The emergence of an affluent middle class is triggering demand for the mobile and internet segments. Strong policy support from the government has been crucial to the sector's development. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) cap in the telecom sector has been increased to 100 per cent from 74 per cent.
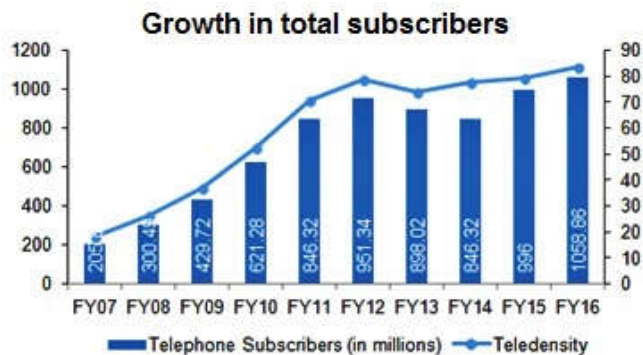
Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, TechSci Research
Notes: CAGR - Compound Annual Growth Rate

Literature Review

- Diversity can be measured on a host of dimensions—ethnicity, gender, skills, and so on. A group may be diverse on one or more dimensions and homogeneous on others. If a group is diverse in any way, a flaw in our cognitive processing can lead us to perceive it as diverse in every way—a distortion that might help explain why inclusion remains so challenging for many companies. ("Spillover Bias in Diversity Judgment," Daniels, Neala & Greer, year).The real value of diversity in the global marketplace today is not just ethnicity, not just gender, but also the diversity of thought that allows a company to truly innovate," says Larry Harrington, vice president of internal audit at Raytheon, a global defense and security company, and champion of The IIA's Diversity & Inclusion initiative. Traditionally, many professions-internal audit included-have tended to attract people of like minds, schooling, and backgrounds, he says. But the danger of this trend is twofold. First, it creates monocultures that are insular and conservative in the way that they think. Second, people from minority cultures feel invisible in such organizations and often leave because their views are not heard or acted on (The focus on people, June 2015).

- 2.2 Diversity at workplace needs to be envisioned as a strategic business imperative that brings together people from various societal clusters to work In a diverse nation such as India, every organization needs to manage workplace diversity as a key business imperative in order to drive better business outcomes. as a team for a common business goal. The core philosophy of a multi-cultural organization is to provide equal opportunities to people coming from different economic & cultural backgrounds, varied geographies, diverse genders, different generations as well as those who are specially-abled (Human Capital

, June 2016)Diversity may be defined as the presence of differences among members of a social unit (Jackson et al., 1995). Diversity is an increasingly important factor in organisational life as organisations worldwide become more diverse in terms of the gender, race, ethnicity, age, national origin and other personal characteristics of their members (Shaw and Barrett□Power, 1998). Today, the workforce comprises people who are different and share different attitudes, needs, desires, values and work behaviours (Deluca and McDowell, 1992; Morrison, 1992; Rosen and Lovelace, 1991).The concept of workplace diversity might differ from company to company according to the rules and guidelines that have been stipulated for a particular purpose and also the meaning a company gives to it and how it is often utilised.

Factors affecting workforce diversity

- **Company type :** The type of a company plays a significant role in the decision making process of the company in determining whether or not to employ a diverse workforce. Companies differ in size and activities, and come with its own rules and company act

- **Organisational culture :** Organisational culture could be defined as a set of values that are share in the organisation, which reflects on the company's activities. There are five components to organisational culture that involves its practices, vision, value, people, place, and its history. Each organisational culture is unique and different from any other companies, therefore any decision made my a company about workplace diversity is based on the company's beliefs and norms, and must therefore reflect on that company. (Coleman 2013)

- **Company Location:** Company location contributes to the decisions of a company to or not to employ a diverse workforce. Companies that have their manufacturing plants situate in most parts of the world does not seem to have much choice but to employ workers from diverse cultures, since workers are needed in each office they operate. However some companies has the ability to decide whether or not to employ a diverse workforce especially when they are situated only in their country of origin.

Advantages of Workforce Diversity

- **High level of Productivity**: Increasing productivity at the workplace has been one of the major challenges for managers and leaders and to the company in general. Due to the fact that every organisation has its own unique company structure and objectives, different strategies may be used to challenge or address the company in order to increase productivity. One of those strategies involves adopting workplace diversity and managing it effectively.

- **Exchange of varieties of ideas and Team work**: In recent times teamwork is increasingly advocated by businesses and organisations as a means of assuring better outcomes on tasks and also for the delivery of goods and services. A single person taking on multiple tasks cannot perform at the same pace as a team could; therefore each team member brings to the table different ideas and offers a unique perspective

during problem solving to effectively arrive at the best solution at the shortest possible time

- **Learning and growth**: Diversity at the workplace creates an opportunity for employee's personal growth. When workers are being exposed to new cultures, ideas and perspectives, it can help each person to intellectually reach out and have a clearer insight of their place in the global environment and hence their own surroundings.

- **Effective Communication**: Workplace diversity can immensely strengthen a company's relationship with some specific group of customers by making communication more effective. Customer service department is one of the areas where effective communication is crucial. A customer service personnel or representatives can be paired up with customers from their specific area or location, making the customer feel at home with the representative and thus with the company

- **Diverse Experience**: Employee and their co-workers that come from a diverse background bring to the table some amount of unique perceptions and experience during teamwork or group tasks. Pooling the diverse skills and knowledge of culturally distinct employees together can immensely benefit the company by strengthening the responsiveness and productivity of the team to adapt to the changing conditions.

Challenges of Workforce Diversity

- **High Cost of Diversity Management:** To increase job satisfaction, workplace diversity management could sometimes be very costly, when an organisation strives to effectively manage the diverse workforce, it undergoes mandatory diversity training during which supervisors, employees, and managers receive lessons on the best way to interact with employees and clients.

- **Discrimination:** One significant disadvantages of working with a diverse workforce is discrimination in the part of both managers and employees. It can exist but hidden aspect of a poorly managed workplace. When a worker is being discriminated, it affects his ability to perform well and it also affect the perception of equity and raises issues of litigation

- **Communication issues:** Workplace diversity can negatively impact communication in the company. It can place an obstacle in the way of effective communication, which can cause a decrease in productivity and dampen the cohesiveness among workers. Even though spending time with employees by getting to know them helps reduce and in some instances eradicate communication barriers during a long-term, co-workers orientation periods and an individual´s first impressions can be difficult to control when culture clash.

- **Myriad Accommodation:** Although the premise of workplace diversity is mutual respect, making way to accommodate each diverse worker´s request can be burdensome of employers, which makes it difficult to manage diversity. (Source: The Impact of Workplace Diversity on Organisations , Priscilla Dike)

Trends in Diversity

- **Greater involvement of the higher management:** It has been observed since the year 2-15 that there is greater input from the top management such as the CEO or the Managing Director of the company who are using their position, power and authority to make a statement with respect to the need and importance of diversity in the workplace. A fine example of this is an instance where Intel's CEO Brian Krzanich used his platform at the 2015 International Consumer Electronics Show to announce a major Diversity in Technology initiative while Mark Zuckerberg the CEO and Sheryl Sandberg the COO of Facebook have been actively promoting progressive corporate diversity initiatives in the Silicon Valley and elsewhere

- **Innovation in the implementation of diversity:** Many organisations are taking innovative approaches to promote inclusivity in their organisation and a primary step towards this is the creation of professional job roles that carter to the diversity needs of the organisation and solver various issues and problems in this regard. The diversity numbers of Facebook were not very impressive with 69% male and 53% white workers to the appointment of Maxine Williams as the Global Director of Diversity for the organisation and Facebook has since revamped their inclusivity index to a significant extent with the tech giant announcing that they will be hiring a lot more minorities as of August 2nd 2017

- **Change in the meaning of diversity:** The term diversity has expanded to a significant extent to not just ethnic diversity but also that of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and seniority in terms of experience and skills of the workforce. Having a team of diverse employees help them work better collectively and learn from the experience and wisdom of senior employees while newer employees bring a fresh perspective to the problem at hand

- **Role of technology:** Technology has played a major role in helping organisation inculcate diversity in their daily functioning with many organisations opting for digital sensitisation programs, online seminars and awareness campaigns to imbibe the sense of diversity

Diversity in Telecommunications Sector in India

1. The telecom sector has among the lowest number female workforce—an average of between 8% and 15%, far less than the 26.6% overall female participation rate in the total workforce, according to the Gender Diversity Benchmark for Asia 2014 study. This is in sharp contrast to the tremendous amount of opportunities in the telecommunications sector due to massive growth which is expected to touch $37 Billion by the end of 2017.

2. Another reason for the low male-female workforce ration can be attributed to the fact that only about 26% of female employees get global exposure roles in comparison toclose to 53% of their male counterparts. This is because managers unconsciously decide that female employees might have domestic responsibilities and hence are not even considered for

those roles, as quoted by Ms.ShachiIrde, executive director of Catalyst India WRC, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to expand opportunities for women and business.

3. In spite of these statistics there has been an improvement in this sphere with at least 10 women executives joining major telecommunication companies such as Airtel and Vodafone India in senior management positions since the year 2009.

4. A fine example of the increasing emphasis on diversity is the fact that at Vodafone India in the year 2014 there were 18 woman zonal managers out of 100 zonal offices whereas there was only 1 female zonal officer in the year 2005

Research Methodology

The information for this paper was collected from the company website of telecommunication operators in India in the form of their sustainability report , company and diversity reports available for public use and existing research papers through Ebscobar which have been duly acknowledged at the appropriate places.

FINDING

- Upon comparing the diversity and inclusivity practices and statistics at the top two telecommunications companies in India, it has been observed that there is an increasing amount of emphasis being placed on gender diversity and representation in the organisation with a greater number of women in managerial roles in these companies.

- Taking the case of Vodafone India, 6% of senior leadership team and 30% of the Vodafone Group Board are women with the company aiming at becoming the best employer for women by the year 2025. In line with this long term objective, the organisation has identified Women Empowerment as one of their core global transformative goals. The company has a history of undertaking campaigns, activities and programs for the empowerment of women and increasing the male-female workforce ratio ,one such example is the ReConnect initiative to bring women back into the workforce after a career break designed to address the challenge of the 'leaky pipeline' and maximise the ability of the organisation to recruit, retain and develop women at every stage of the workforce. One of the key medium-term goal of the organisation is to grow the proportion of senior female managers (including senior leadership team) worldwide to 30% by 2020, up from 25% as of March 2017 with the intention of increasing this proportion over time

- Every quarter, progress of the organisationis tracked in comparison to the 2020 global target which aims to increase the ratio of women managers globally to 30%. The results of that quarterly analysis are reviewed by HR directors in local markets and professional functions in order to identify problems and devise approaches to fill gaps in the progress chart. Vodafone's global gender balance is reviewed twice a year by the Group Executive Committee – led by the Group Chief Executive – with updates presented to the Vodafone Group Board

- Vodafone India as of 8th March 2016 has 21-22% of female workforce plans to increase this percentage to 33 by the year 2018. It was reported that Vodafone India had 14% of female workforce as of 2014 which has increased to 22% in the year 2016.The company has stated that since 33% of their customer base in India consists of women they would like to have the same number of female employees employed in their workforce.

- Taking the case of Airtel India , their business strategy is built on the pillar of 'Win for the people' and by having a balanced performance management system which is backed by rewards , recognitions and the promotion of equality and diversity allows Airtel to become an equal opportunity employer thereby contributing positively to their goals of greater and impactful diversity.

- The organisation has iterated their belief in their Annual Report for the year 2016-17 , that diversity contributes to a rich work culture and experience for the workforce and the importance of ensuring that their workforce is not just engages but also competent in various spheres of business. Being an equal opportunity employer, the organisational structure of Airtel is free from discrimination of any kind on the basis of race, religion , gender ,caste , experience etc.

- 10% of Airtel's total permanent workforce comprises of female employees with the report also stating that women are presented with equal job opportunities in the organisation and are given the respect that is due to them without any discrimination

- Apart from hiring practices, the organisation also places utmost emphasis on the health and safety of their employees. In accordance with this , in the financial year 2014-15 600 women employees of Airtel were trained in self defense , parenting and health awareness as well as organising 'Women's Personal Safety Session' in Airtel Centre, Gurgaon which was attended by over 200 women employees.

- Although there is a lack of representation of women in the board of directors of the organisation with only 2 Non-Executive Directors of the organisation being women as per the Annual Report for the year 2016-17 , the company is encouraging women in key leadership roles and core functions and Harmeen Mehta, the global chief information officer of Airtel, who is one of few woman Chief Information Officers in India and has a workforce comprising of 13% of women in her department which is a vital measure towards encouraging women to take up managerial and decision making roles in major telecommunications companies such as Airtel. Other women who hold senior positions include Vani Venkatesh, the chief executive of retail operations, and Swati Kamat, the vice president of networks.

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