

Diversity and Equality Management System (DEMS): A Narrative Review and Future Research Directions

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Abstract: Diversity and equality management system is a primary concern for many organizations, due to increased globalization resulting in diverse demographics in the workplace, and changes in organizational structures. Today's organizations need to create an inclusive climate where diversity is valued and provide a voice to a diverse human capital pool. Bundling of diversity management practice has been recognized as a diversity and equality management system (DEMS) that helps the firm to create an inclusive climate for diversity. Implementing DEM system signals to employees that the firm value diversity and provide fair treatment and inclusion to its diverse workforce. Many empirical studies have been conducted in this area; still, there is no common consensus on the composition of an effective DEM system (DEMS). This study provides a narrative review of DEM system to understand what constitute an effective DEM system and how it affects organizational performance. Besides giving insight into DEM system, the purpose of this paper is to provide research gaps and directions for future research.

Keywords: Equal opportunity, diversity and equality management system, diversity management practices, workforce diversity.

1. Introduction

In the last three decades the composition of the workforce has been changing very fast mostly in terms of age, gender, education, ethnicity, culture, disabilities and values, partly due to legal and social changes, increased globalization, and changes in organizational structures (Marvin & Girling., 2010; Armstrong et al., 2010; Patnaik & Shukla, 2020). This heterogeneous composition of the workforce requires managers and practitioners to shift their approach from treating each group of workers alike to recognize differences among them. Also, the prevailing literature indicates that if the heterogeneous workforce isn't managed properly, there would be a negative impact on the organization which will end in higher voluntary turnover, difficulty in communication and destructive interpersonal conflict, feeling of discrimination among employees, low motivation, negative image of the organization between existing employees and potential employees (Elsaid, 2012). To understand differences and manage these differences

a new approach to diversity management (DM) was coined by Roosevelt Thomas in 1990 to stipulate the competitive benefits of managing diversity beyond complying with legal requirements (Kelly & Doddin, 1998). This idea emerged within the United States as a sort of reframing of the affirmative action programs or equal employment opportunity act, which were constituted through Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 within the USA to address the problems at workplace inequality and diversity, and later on, it dispersed all over the world (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Thomas, R.R., 1990; Richard et al., 2013; Shatrughan & Lenka, 2020). Diversity management (DM) is defined as the set of an organization's voluntary practices and policies developed and implemented by the organization to manage a diverse workforce effectively (Yang & Konrad, 2011). The diversity researchers enthusiastically explored various diversity management practices (e.g., gender diversity policies, diversity training, racial diversity, leadership policies) and found a positive impact of these practices on organizational performance in terms of enhancing employees and organizational creativity & innovation, improved problem-solving and decision-making skills, increased productivity, reduced cost linked to turnover and absenteeism (Elsas & Graves, 1997; Kandola, 1995; Yang & Konrad, 2010; Armstrong et al., 2010), as well as the negative impact on group cohesion, conflicts, feeling of discrimination among employees and voluntary turnover (Roberson, 2019). Thus, a previous study indicates that if the organizations are successful in attracting a diverse workforce at workplace but fail to manage diversity can stimulate negative outcomes (Riordan, 2000). Effective diversity management requires the implementation of specialized policies, programs and practices to reinforce workplace diversity and equality as these policies develop a strong perception among employees that their organization values their wellbeing, consider views and ideas in the decision-making process, and provides equal treatment to its employees (Jones et al., 2007). Given that researchers and practitioners increasingly devote attention to diversity and equality management practices as it enables them to attenuate the

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negative consequence, capitalize on workforce diversity and create an inclusive workplace (Kossek et al., 2005; Chanda, D'Netto and Monga, 2009). For greater inclusion of all stakeholders, the business leaders have now started investment in DEM practices (Richard et al., 2013). For example, as per research around 95% of 1000 Fortune companies have started giving diversity training to their employees to increase collaboration and awareness about individual differences (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008; Richard et al., 2013).

The bundling of diversity and equality management practices has been conceptualized as a diversity and equality management system (DEMS). The diversity researchers have advocated that the impact of diversity management practices on individuals as well organizations can be understood by examining bundle, configuration or system of DM practices. The existing theoretical research argues that it is important to analyze the impact of diversity management practices in bundles, not in isolation. These bundling perspectives is based on the notion that each DEM practice often complements each other, while adoption of one practice would be less effective in managing diversity than in combination. The plethora of research has explored various diversity management practices (eg. gender diversity policies, leadership policies, diversity training, work-life programs and recruitment monitoring) and demonstrated valuable impact on organizational performance (Armstrong et al., 2010; Ali & Konrad, 2017). Therefore, diversity researchers have argued that individual DEM practice might not give competitive advantages, while “bundling” of various DEM practices would lead to stronger effects on organizational performance in terms of more innovation and creativity, lower turnover intension, competitive advantages and it would also difficult for competitors to copy these practices (Richard et al., 2013). The bundling of DEM practices and policies is defined as a diversity and equality management system (DEMS) that help firm to create an inclusive environment (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Richard et al., 2013). The findings show that implementing such a system at the workplace gives a positive signal to stakeholders, that the firm takes voluntary initiatives to provide equality, fair treatment and inclusion at the workplace (Ali & Konrad, 2017). The purpose of DEM system is to indicate that the firm value diversity and make efforts in promoting an inclusive workplace. Several studies have discussed the composition of DEM system, for example, Armstrong et al., (2010) proposed that DEM system includes many practices for diversity management such as written policies on equality, diversity training for staff, monitoring various recruitment, promotion and pay policies, whereas Ali & Konrad defined DEM system as bundling of various diversity and equality management-related practices, policies and programs to enhance workplace diversity and inclusion. Despite this, there is no common consensus on the composition and effectiveness of DEM system (Armstrong et al., 2010). This narrative review is an effort to know the composition of an effective DEM system and identifies various bundles and outcomes of DEM system. This literature review summarized the previous findings of DEM system in large numbers, further, the bundles and outcomes of DEM system

suggest scope for future research. Moreover, previous studies have only focused on individual DM practices impact on organizational performance (e.g., diversity training, gender and racial diversity) while largely ignored the combination of DEM practice in bundles and their outcomes. Hence, this study includes overall DEM practice bundles called DEM systems through a narrative literature review. The purpose of this paper is to present a detailed and comprehensive picture of DEM system which is not done in the previous study. Although researchers have shown quite an interest in the area of DEM system, still some research questions remain to answer, and thus our study attempts to cover those areas through this review paper.

2. Literature Review

The literature review section throws light on three aspects of DEM system: the composition of effective diversity and equality management system (DEMS), and bundles of DEM system explored by many authors and the impact of DEM system on organizational performance.

1) *Composition of effective diversity and equality management system (DEMS)*

To develop an understanding of the composition of effective diversity and equality management system (DEMS) researchers have given various definitions of DEM system along with the support of theories such as AMO theory of performance, strategic human resource management theory. The following section is an attempt to unveil the composition of DEM system with the help of these theories.

DEMS is opined as a system of managing a diverse workforce by offering fair treatment, equal opportunities and creating an inclusive environment for the utilization of potential human resources by the organization to realize competitive advantages (Patnaik & Shukal, 2020; Yang & Konrad, 2011). Ali & Konrad (2017), defined DEM system as a process of bundling various DEM-related policies, practices and programs developed and implemented by organizations to enhance workplace diversity and inclusion. Diverse and inclusive workplace practices make the organization more inclusive where everyone believes that S/he are being treated equally and are getting equal participation in all the areas of decisions regardless of their age, gender, region, religion and educational background (Shore et al., 2017). To gain competitive advantages such as attracting and retaining talented human resources from various backgrounds, motivating them to achieve organizational goals, the inclusive environment is the need of the hour in today's organizations (Ali & Konrad, 2017, Richard et al., 2013). To create an inclusive environment, it is required that the organization voluntarily develops and implements a sophisticated DEM system that allows a diverse workforce to participate in all the areas of the workplace (Ali & Konrad). DEM practices are characterized as a firm capability for the investment in DEM practices to create greater inclusion of all stakeholders (Yang & Konrad, 2011; Richard et al., 2013). Conclusively, an effective DEM system help organization in creating an inclusive environment within the organization where every employee irrespective of age, gender,

race, religion, and region is allowed to participate in organizational processes and organization recognize and reward their contribution without any discrimination. Konrad et al., (2016) suggested that DEM system would give more competitive advantages if it is incorporated with the strategic human resource management practices. Researchers have also argued that DEMS is a part of strategic human resource management (SHRM), as DEM practices provide various competitive advantages for the organization such as increasing the diverse talent pool lead to innovation and feeling of inclusion prevent turnover intension (Armstrong et al., 2010; Richard & Johnson, 2001).

Invoking the SHRM perspective, diversity researchers indicated that individual DEM practice alone may not be effective in providing competitive advantage; instead, combination or bundling of these practices and policies would have more effects on organizational performance (Richard et al., 2013; Combs et al., 2016). In turn, researchers have expanded the definition of diversity management by bundling various DEM related practices and policies such as policies on gender diversity to increase the representation of females, leadership policies to enhance participation of all, work-life programs to prevent anxiety, and top management team diversity (Ali & Konrad 2017) recruiting and selecting diverse staff, training and developing a diverse staff (Konrad, Yang and Maurer 2016). Richard et al., 2013, bundled two more DEM practices namely DEM practices related to minority opportunity and manager accountability.

In sum, it can be said that bundling of DEM practices is an effective way to manage diversity than individual practices. Thus effective DEM system is defined as a process by which various diversity management practices are bundled or combined in a single system to enhance diversity and inclusion at the workplace (Ali & Konrad, 2017). Implementation of strong DEM system help to develop a perception among employees that the organization value diversity and provide equal opportunity to its diverse workforce (Patnaik & Shukla, 2020). The existing literature found a positive impact of DEM system on organizational performance in terms of creating a positive climate, innovation and creativity in the operations. The next section discussed bundles of DEM systems and their impact on organizational performance.

2) *Bundles of DEM practices and their impact on organizational performance*

Diversity researchers argued that bundling of DEM practices together provide more competitive advantage and lead to stronger effects on firm performance (Combs et al., 2006). Konrad et al., (2016) examined the impact of DEM practice bundles such as recruitment and selection diversity policies, training and development diversity policies, work-life programs etc, on organizational performance in terms of employment statistics and return on assets. The findings indicate that DEM system positively enhanced the percentages of employees and managers with having some disabilities compare to an organization which do not implement such DEM practices. Therefore, research findings also support the argument that bundling of various diversity management

practices leads to stronger effects on organizational performance than individual DM practice (Richard et al., 2013; Combs et al., 2006). Armstrong et al., (2010) study four bundles of DEM practices (e.g., recruitment and selection; promotions; pay rate; and written policy on managing diversity). The analysis shows that greater use of DEM system would result in enhancing organizational performance in terms of high labor productivity, innovation and low turnover ratio. There was limited empirical evidence to support the contention that bundling of DM practice increase diversity at the higher level. To fill this gap, Richard et al., (2013) conducted an empirical study to examine minority representation in the managerial rank by considering two bundles namely, the opportunity to minority group and managers accountability towards diversity at a higher level. The results suggest that firms implementing these bundles of DEM practice have increased the representation of racial diversity at a higher level.

Ali & Konrad, (2017) studied three bundles in DEM system: diversity policies on gender, leadership policies and work-life programs. The findings also support the existing concept that policies related to gender and work-life balance leads to better performance outcomes. Patnaik & Shukla (2020), bundled three practices in DEM system namely: practices related to (1) recruitment and selection, (2) training, development and monitoring and (3) work-life flexibility. The findings suggest that employees training and development policies and work-life programs are the most effective practices to enhance firm performance.

Researchers have also applied performance theory: ability-motivation-and opportunity (AMO) to ensure the impact of DEMS on organizational performance. Researchers argued that organizational performance depends on (1) competency and ability of employees which requires transparent staffing and hiring policies), (2) employees motivation (through workplace justice and fairness in selection and promotion, career advancement policies, (3) opportunities in the decision-making process (through the participation of all employees to share their ideas (Armstrong et al., 2010; Ali & Konrad, 2017; Richard et al., 2013; Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Appelbaum et al., 2000).

Through this review article, an attempt is made to explore various bundles of DEMS and their impact on organizational performance. Conclusively, the existing literature reported that implementation of DEM system in companies resulted in firm-level benefits such as organization's ability to hire a diverse workforce and retain them for a longer period (Mckay et al., 2007), increased market share and internationalization (Coz & Balke), greater creativity and innovation (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998; Wilson, 1996; Armstrong et al., 2010), staffing diversity (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Richard et al., 2013), diverse perspective on business issues and improved community relations and enhanced company image (Nykiel, 1997), reduced cost linked to turnover and absenteeism (Kandola, 1995; Armstrong et al ., 2010). Further many of these firm-level benefits may accrue from the benefits that employees drive from DEMS, such as an increased sense of fairness in the workplace reduced work-related stress and increased job

satisfaction (Siegel et al., 2003; O'Connell & Russell, 2005). Employees' belief that the firm treats them fairly can influence several attitudes and behaviours of organizational relevance such as commitment (Brockner et al., 1997) and trust (Konovsky & Puch, 1994). Lambert, 2000 findings support that the extent to which employees perceive that their firm is providing them with a working environment where social benefits (such as work-life programs) and a sense of fairness (inclusive leadership, gender diversity policies) are important values, they will be more motivated to reward their firm with discretionary efforts. Despite these pieces of evidence of the benefits of implementing DEM system, the literature indicates a dearth of research in DEM system. The next section of this review outline existing gaps in DEM system which can be addressed in future research.

3. Research Methodology

A narrative review of the extant literature on diversity and equality management systems (DEMS) was carried out through relevant search of keywords like workforce diversity, diversity management practices, diversity and equality management system, equal opportunity. The narrative literature review identifies and summarizes what has been previously published, avoiding duplications, and seeking new study areas not yet addressed (Ferrari, 2015). These types of review articles do not list the type of methodological approaches used to conduct the review. Narrative literature review articles have an important role in developing an understanding of a specific topic or theme. To access the relevant articles from diversity research, the authors searched relevant databases (Google Scholar, Emeralds, Scopus, SAGE, and JSTOR). Through the database around 63 papers were selected. All papers were placed in a Microsoft Excel file.

4. DEMS: Results and Discussion

Through this narrative review, we develop an understanding of effective diversity and equality management system (DEMS) and summarize the impact of various DEM practice bundles on organizational performance. We included both qualitative and quantitative studies to address our research objectives. The research objective that what constitutes effective DEM system has been achieved by reviewing various research paper and it is summarised that an effective DEM system constitute bundles of diversity and equality management practices which are voluntarily implemented by the organization to create an inclusive environment so that fair treatment and equal opportunity can be provided to its diverse workforce and any sort of discrimination and injustice feeling can be avoided among employees. The various bundles of the DEM system and its impact on organizational performance have been analysed and accumulated in this review paper.

The findings demonstrate the profound impact of DEM system on organizational performance in terms of high labor productivity, increased innovation and creativity, more teamwork, improved financial performance, gender and racial diversity at the managerial rank, lower turnover intention etc.

These findings also support the researchers claim that bundling of different DEM practice, lead to stronger effects on firm performance and provide more competitive advantage (Richard et al., 2013; Ali & Konrad, 2017). Unlike previous reviews, the current review not only summarized various bundles of DEM practice and its impact on organizational performance but also categorized the benefits of implementing DEM system into the firm level and employee level. This study also unveiled many research gaps and proved to be a one-stop-shop for DEM system, as this is the first narrative review that composed all emerging bundles of DEM system in a single study.

1) Firm-level benefits

- Develop an inclusive environment in the organization that attracts talent from a variety of backgrounds which in turn reduced costs linked to turnover and absenteeism (Kandola, 1995).
- Indicates that firm value diversity and provide equal treatment to all, in turn, employee reciprocate in achieving organizational goals (Ali & Konrad, 2017).
- Companies that effectively implemented DEMS have higher levels of innovation (Moss-Kanter, 1983).
- More competitive advantage in terms of diverse talent, lower turnover ratio, innovation etc (Cox & Blake, 1991).

2) Employee-level benefits

- Reduced work-related stress
- Increased job satisfaction and
- Reduced voluntary turnover intension
- Increased teamwork
- Enhanced commitment and trust

Despite these benefits, finding across studies indicates limited study in DEMS. The next section provides direction for future research so that these gaps can be addressed.

5. Limitation and Direction for Future Research

Through this narrative review, we have attempted to develop an understanding of an effective DEM system. This study found bundling of DEM practice constitute an effective DEM system which leads to competitive advantage and better firm performance. The existing literature indicates that there is a minimal study that supports a positive relationship between DEM system and organizational performance (Richard et al., 2013). The previous study also argues that while the firm may adopt and implement various diversity and equality management policies to gain more competitive advantage, still there is a need to analyse the effectiveness of these practices on organizational performance and also, explore which DEM practice is more effective in improving organizational performance. Therefore, future research should examine which DEM practice is more effective in improving organizational performance. Richard et al., (2013) study proved that bundling of DEM practices improved representation of minority (racial diversity) at a higher level, it would be ideal for future research to investigate how these bundles of DEM practices impact the level of gender diversity at a higher level. DEM system is implemented to meet specific goals such as increasing diversity,

addressing injustice and feeling of discrimination, providing equal opportunities, enhancing financial performance, promoting goodwill or reducing turnover ratio, yet literature indicates limited research on the relationship between DEM system and outcomes in a different context, like outcomes in terms of employee satisfaction and well-being is yet to study. This review literature found a very limited study that examined moderates and mediating role of other constructs (Ali & Konrad, 2017; Patnaik & SHukla, 2020) in between DEM system and organizational performance. There is a need to explore other constructs that moderates and mediates the impact of DEM system on organizational performance. Richard et al., (2013) suggested that future research can examine the role of clan-oriented culture in DEM system. The diversity researchers argued that DEM system will be more effective if it is aligned with the business human resource management (SHRM) to achieve firm goals (Armstrong et al., 2010; Konrad et al., 2016) but there is limited evidence to support this argument. Therefore, an empirical study should be conducted to prove this argument. Very little research examined the impact of DEM system on firm financial performance therefore little is known about the association between DEM system and firm financial performance; future research should address this gap. Conclusively, it is documented that DEM system is not deeply explored and future research needs more attention to fill existing gaps in DEM system.

6. Conclusion

The adequate empirical research on diversity and equality management systems (DEMS) has been mostly studied in western countries. There is a dearth of literature review on this topic, therefore; this study tried to fill this gap through this narrative paper. This study investigates various research papers including papers related to diversity management, diversity and equality management practice, and DEM system to develop an understanding of an effective DEM system. The study reviewed various papers published in reputed journals such as European management journal, Human resource management, and Equality, diversity and Inclusion: An international journal etc, to explore bundles and consequences of DEM system. Therefore, this study fills a research gap and develops a holistic understanding of DEM system. This study concludes that diversity and equality management system (DEMS) contains bundles of organization's policies, programs, and practices which are developed and implemented to enhance workplace diversity and inclusion, offer fair treatment to all, justice and fairness in selection and promotion, providing diversity training, and creating an inclusive work environment where every employee can participate in organization's goals. Overall, this study provides a summary of research on DEM system that can help researchers to find the research gap for future studies.

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