Executive Summary

The key concepts and theories from MSA 604 course “Administration, Globalization and Multiculturalism” are presented in this research and are applied to an administrative issue. The course focuses on theoretical and applied concepts and skills essential to successfully managing an environment of workplace diversity and multiculturalism within domestic and global organizations. Key concepts of the course include succeeding in a diverse workplace, understanding cultures, stereotyping and prejudice, workplace discrimination, parallel cultures, working with specific persons (race, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.), inclusive corporate cultures, international human resources, and leadership and employee behavior in international business. Diversity in the workplace can provide many advantages, but can also present challenges if not effectively managed.

The purpose of this research is to study how project managers should address cultural barriers within the project team. The overarching question is the following: What are the effects of poor project management on the overall success of a project at SignArt, Inc? All aspects of project management can have different effects on the project success. As diversity increases in the workplace, it also increases in project teams. Diversity in project teams is important because different backgrounds and experiences are valuable to project success. The role of a project manager includes understanding cultural variables of individuals on a project team and how any cultural barriers must be addressed. The organization of focus is SignArt, Inc. in Kalamazoo, MI, a full-service sign company with a team of sales specialists, sales support, and project managers who lead the projects completed for SignArt’s local and national accounts.

A literature review of resources outside of the course was completed and is presented in this paper. The topics of focus include diversity in the workplace, effects of cultural variables,
and effective diversity management. These topics are important as they relate to diversity in the workplace and references from several studies are presented to support their importance. Each topic also relates to the author’s project management concentration and administrative issue sub-question.

The topics covered relate to project management because project managers must be able to manage a diverse project team and address cultural barriers within project teams. Cultural variables are examined, and recommendations are made for addressing cultural barriers in project teams. The recommendations include developing an effective diversity management plan that includes a strategy for diversity inclusion and responses to potential cultural barriers within a project team. Effectively managing diversity and addressing cultural barriers is essential to project success. Resources are referenced to support the findings on how project managers at SignArt, Inc should address cultural barriers within the project team.
Paper 3: Addressing Cultural Barriers within Project Teams

MSA 604 Administration, Globalization and Multiculturalism

MSA 698 Directed Administrative Portfolio

Central Michigan University

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Introduction

Project managers play a vital role in the success of a project. Project managers are responsible for planning, executing, monitoring, and controlling a project from start to finish. To be successful in completing a project, the project manager must effectively manage the project team and stakeholders. Part of managing the project team includes understanding different cultures to successfully managing a diverse project team. Diversity in project teams is important because different backgrounds and experiences are valuable to project success. Diversity in the workplace is continually growing and therefore, is continually growing in project teams. Failure to address culture barriers within the project team can negatively impact project success.

The organization selected for this research paper is SignArt, Inc. in Kalamazoo, MI. This organization is made up of approximately 60 full-time employees in office, manufacturing, and field settings. SignArt, Inc. is a full-service sign company which provides services from design to installation and maintenance. The company has been in business for 47 years under the same ownership. A team of sales specialists, sales support, and project managers lead the projects completed at SignArt’s local and national accounts.

The administrative issue related to the author’s Master of Science in Administration (MSA) concentration is the following: What are the effects of poor project management on the overall success of a project at SignArt, Inc? What can be done to solve this problem? The sub-question related to the MSA 604 course is the following: How should project managers address cultural barriers within the project team? The main concepts of MSA 604 will be illustrated and relative concepts will be applied to the administrative issue.
MSA 604 Course Overview

The Master of Science in Administration Course 603 is titled “Administration, Globalization and Multiculturalism”. The course focuses on theoretical and applied concepts and skills essential to successfully managing an environment of workplace diversity and multiculturalism within domestic and global organizations. The MSA 604 textbook stated “When cultural difference are understood and appreciated, we tend to form cross-cultural relationships that broaden and deepen our worldviews, which in turn stimulates our thinking and creativity. We boost our effectiveness and productivity – and therefore our success in life” (CMU, n.d., p. 2). The core topics covered include succeeding in a diverse workplace, understanding cultures, stereotyping and prejudice, workplace discrimination, parallel cultures, working with specific persons (race, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.), inclusive corporate cultures, international human resources, and leadership and employee behavior in international business.

Diversity in the workplace is significantly evolving and barriers of diversity are being challenged. As stated in the MSA 604 textbook “The kinds of people we see in high-powered jobs are more diverse. The way people work together and the tasks they do are changing. And the way business is done throughout the world is changing by the day” (CMU, n.d., p. 3). The course textbook covers working with different ethic and diverse groups; including the seven largest ethic groups and four diverse groups. The ethic groups include African Americans, Arab Americans, Asian Americans, Euro-Americans, Jewish Americans, Latino Americas, and American Indians. The diverse groups include persons with disabilities, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons, older persons, and obese persons. It is very important to understand each of these groups and what language individuals deem appropriate when working together.
The following section illustrates course highlights including understanding cultures, stereotyping and workplace discrimination, and inclusive corporate cultures.

**Course Highlights**

Understanding cultures involves understanding both one’s own culture and other’s cultures. Key topics in the section include how cultural knowledge can improve relationships, understanding the basics of culture, major differences in cultures, bi-ethnic and multi-ethnic persons, and American corporation cultures. “Cultural understanding gives you some clues about why people from various cultures and subcultures think and act as they do” (CMU, n.d., p. 29). Cultural differences can make communication difficult, which is why it is so important to understand culture differences and how to approach such differences in the workplace. The textbook presents eleven major cultural differences including source of control, collectivism or individualism, homogeneous or heterogeneous, feminine of masculine, rank-status, risk orientation, decision-making, time use, space use, communication style, and economic system. Understanding these differences can help individuals better understand co-workers of a different culture.

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, while all related, have three separate meanings. Stereotype is a way of thinking, prejudice is a way of feeling, and discrimination is a way of acting. Key topics involving these concepts are how we can pinpoint our prejudices, prejudice-prone personalities, how and why we become prejudice, how people express prejudice, how prejudice affects people, how discrimination affects employees, melting pot approach to managing diversity, and legal approach to managing diversity. “Prejudice affects the personalities of the persons who hold the prejudice as well as those on the receiving end” (CMU, n.d., p. 134). Prejudice has a different effect than discrimination because it is generally not acted
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upon. “Discrimination against diverse persons makes it more difficult for them to get good jobs. If they do get the job, discrimination gets in the way of their success on the job. Discrimination also affects their trust, motivation, and productivity” (CMU, n.d., p. 137). Increased efforts are being made to reduce prejudice and discrimination in the workplace.

Inclusive corporate cultures must be implemented to effectively manage diverse individuals. “Managing diversity is all about recognizing and responding effectively to the leadership challenges and opportunities you encounter in the workplace” (CMU, n.d., p. 677). Such leadership opportunities include creating an inclusive culture, adopting an inclusive multicultural approach, building on equal opportunity principles, modifying corporate systems and practices, including all employees in bottom-line efforts, building consensus for change, and overcoming resistance to diversity initiatives. All leadership opportunities start with an inclusive organizational culture, which is necessary for successful results. Effectively managing diversity leads to improvement in all areas of the workplace.

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this section is to review and analyze literature related the topics and concepts of managing diversity. Extensive literature exists about this subject; a number of such resources have been selected and organized into sub-topics that best relate to research topic. The topics include diversity in the workplace, effects of cultural variables, and effective diversity management. These topics are best suited for the presentation of literature because they are directly related to the subject and research sub-question related to MSA 604.

**Diversity in the Workplace**

Workplace diversity has become increasingly important since discrimination was prohibited in the 1960s. Diversity in the workplace continues to grow and impact organizational
goals. Diversity is present in all types of businesses and should be effectively managed to promote team work and success.

Diversity includes the entire spectrum of primary dimensions of an individual, including Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Age, Religion, Disability, Sexual orientation, Socio-economic status, Beliefs and Ideologies. The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique in recognizing their individual differences. (Sharma, 2016, p.64)

Supporting diversity involves supporting all dimensions of an individual; failure to support all dimensions is considered discrimination.

According to Urvashi Sharma (2016), there are six primary reasons for why diversity in the workforce is important. These include improved understanding of customer base, increased productivity, greater innovation and creativity, increased skill set, improved employee on-boarding and retention, and larger talent pool. Employees who come from different backgrounds and have a wide range of experiences have more to offer in the areas listed in the preceding sentence. Where one employee may be strong in understanding the customer base, the next may be strong in innovation and creativity. Together, such individuals may an organization stronger as a whole. “Without diversity in the workplace, companies run the risk of becoming monocultural organizations that see things from a very limited perspective” (Anonymous, 2010, p. 1-2).

Although the push to increase and improve workplace diversity is continuously growing, there are still many challenges involved. One of the challenges workplaces are still facing is the issues of discrimination. Despite how workplace diversity has significantly evolved, discrimination still occurs among employees. Another challenge is managing cultural variables
such as language, gestures/body language, religious beliefs, geographical location, etc. Many organizations are working hard to address such challenges and continue encouraging diversity in the workplace. Organizational leaders are finding that the advantages of a diverse workforce outweigh the challenges. “Studies are demonstrating that companies that are more diverse tend to achieve better financial results, employee satisfaction, and lower turnover of talented employees” (Henderson, 2010, pg. 1).

Many organizations have developed and implemented workplace diversity programs to help recruit and retain a diverse workforce; however, many workplace diversity programs are not successful in producing diversity and inclusion (Aponte, Brinkworth, Pruitt, & Young, 2018, p.3). After studying failed workplace diversity programs, researchers Aponte et al. (2018) developed a new program with five key practices for implementing successful workplace diversity. These practices include focus on intervention not just bias reduction, invite non-managers to foster communication across the organization, keep the focus on workplace issues not person ones, keep the conversation going to stay accountable, and be flexible, in both content and delivery. Incorporating such practices can help strengthen workplace diversity integration and acceptance. Strengthening workplace diversity will help strengthen an organization as a whole.

Effects of Cultural Variables

As briefly discussed in the preceding sections, cultural differences in the workplace present challenges which can impact organizational goals. Such challenges arise from cultural variables such as power structure, gender differences, time, communication style, ethics, and conflict resolution. Often times, leaders and individuals are not familiar with or do not understand such cultural variables.
A major challenge for multicultural management is the different cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions that are embraced by various segments of employees. A lack of understanding and valuing of cultural differences can create animosity and division between employees, leading to internal challenges that will hinder overall performance. (as cited in Bateh, Castaneda, & Heyliger, 2013, p. 165).

To reduce the impact of challenges caused by cultural variables, organizational leaders must understand such cultural differences and incorporate the differences into organizational goals. To understand the benefits of cultural variables, one must first understand the differences.

Despite the many challenges associated with cultural variables in the workplace, there are many benefits of cultural variables that should not be overlooked. One of these benefits is the exchange of knowledge between employees of different cultures. A study completed by Gibson, Hajro, and Pudelko (2017) highlighted the knowledge exchange process in multicultural teams. “Many multinational corporations utilize multicultural teams so that members with different nationalities can exchange their unique knowledge in order to capture market share in new locations, exceed competitors’ customer service, secure resources, or implement successful distribution in emerging economies” (as cited in Gibson, Harjo, & Pudelko, 2017, p. 345). The knowledge exchange process involves team members sharing perspectives, information, and know-how in team discussion. Knowledge exchange in multicultural teams, although underutilized, offers significant value to the team and scholars have linked the process with team effectiveness (as cited in Gibson, et al., 2017, p. 347).

Another benefit of cultural variables in the workplace is stronger community relations. With the increase of diversity in communities, organizations must create diverse working environments to match that of their community. “Companies need to be able to communicate
effectively with customers and understand their needs, no matter the customer’s language or culture. Having people on staff who have the background and skills to do so are vital to an organization” (Smith, 2017, para. 5). Customers often feel more comfortable working with someone they can relate to. Therefore, it is very important for organizations to hire diverse individuals.

**Effective diversity management**

To encourage diversity in the workplace, an effective diversity management program or plan must be established and maintained. When developing a diversity program or plan, organizational leaders must ensure they understand the backgrounds and cultural variables of their employees in order to be effective. “Greater awareness of the diversity of employees and showing greater respect for the employee's cultures, will benefit the employer by achieving a more tolerant and harmonious workplace and one that is accordingly more efficient, effective, and productive” (Cavico, Muffler, & Mujtaba, 2012, p. 46). Organizational leaders should see diversity inclusion as an opportunity for growth in their company, and should create a plan to gain the advantages of a diverse workforce.

Effective diversity management begins with creating an inclusive work environment. Authors Maak and Pless (2004) suggested four essential transformational stages for creating an inclusive work environment. These stages include raising awareness, building understanding, encouraging reflection, developing a vision of inclusion, re-thinking key management concepts and principles, and integrating a Human Relations Management system that helps implement change (p. 129). Each of these stages adds significant value when transitioning to an inclusive work environment and it is important that steps of each stage are fully executed. “Building an inclusive diversity culture is a difficult task that requires long-term commitment, as all 'cultural
work’ in organizations does” (Maak & Pless, 2004, p. 144). Organizational leaders must continually make efforts to maintain an inclusive environment and make changes as necessary.

**Relation to Concentration: Project Management**

The concepts of managing diversity relate to the author’s MSA concentration of project management because diversity is present in project teams. Project managers are responsible for understanding different cultures and successfully managing a diverse project team. Diversity in project teams is important because different backgrounds and experiences are valuable to project success. The role of a project manager includes understanding cultural variables of individuals on a project team and how any cultural barriers must be addressed. Cultural barriers within a project team may include, but are not limited to, language barriers, nonverbal communication or body language barriers, generational barriers, religious barriers, or ethical barriers.

When working with an international project team, or any diverse team, the project manager must take the time and make the effort to understand each culture. Failure to do so can impact communication, which in-turn impacts project success. The project manager should also encourage project members to understand cultures other than their own and share knowledge as they learn. An article on effective management of diversity written by Dadfar and Gustavsson (1992) stated that “if diversity is managed well it can be an asset to performance and if the diversity is overlooked or misconducted it may diminish the performance” (p. 83).

The article referenced in the preceding paragraph presented the results of a case study on a sample of six international projects. Cultural diversity was analyzed in terms of national diversity and its relation to project performance and effectiveness of project management. “At the group level, project management and project performance were influenced by culture in areas such as arranging work groups, evoking pride in workers, improving productivity, avoiding
conflicts, and change working traditions” (Dadfar & Gustavsson, 1992, p. 89). The results of this study show the direct correlation between diversity and project management. To eliminate potential impact on project success, project managers must establish a plan for effectively managing cultural barriers within a project team.

**Application to Issue: Cultural Barriers in Project Teams**

As diversity in the workplace continues to increase, diversity in project teams will also continue to increase. In order to grow from the advantages of workplace diversity and overcome cultural barriers, the project manager must establish a plan to address such barriers.

Many management techniques have been employed by various organizations all in an attempt to curb the negative impact of cultural diversity ranging from management controlling, directing, monitoring to partial implementation of diversity role. It is therefore imperative that effective management be put in place in order to quell the negative effect of diversity. (Bamgbade, Jimoh, & Kuroshi, 2014, p. 1048)

Project managers must take the necessary measures to understand the backgrounds of each team member in order to develop an appropriate diversity management plan. A current administrative issue related to project management is the impact of poor project management on the success of a project at SignArt, Inc. A sub-problem related to managing diversity in the workplace is how should project managers address cultural barriers within the project team?

Project managers at SignArt, Inc. are responsible for overseeing projects from start to finish. The average project includes providing a quote to customer(s), project initiation upon customer’s approval, obtaining site survey (if necessary), obtaining appropriate permit(s), producing work order for fabrication and installation (install if local), hiring subcontractor (for install out of service area), maintaining project budget and schedule, coordinating install with
onsite general contractor, obtaining change order (if necessary), and project close-out. There are many stakeholders involved in the projects and it is very important that the project manager identifies any cultural barriers within the project team. Recently, SignArt has had issues with project success as a result of poor communication by one of their project managers. Lack of identifying barriers can impact poor communication.

SignArt’s project team, or key stakeholders, generally includes the project manager, the director of project management, the customer (including site general contractor), design and fabrication individuals (including directors), and self-perform installers (including director) or subcontractor. The project manager(s) should be familiar with the diversity among individuals who are employed by SignArt. However, the stakeholders involved in a project who are associated with the customer or a subcontractor may have a more diverse background. This is where it becomes very important for the project manager(s) to make the effort to understand such backgrounds. Maintaining project communications with individuals outside of the company presents additional obstacles as is. Adding any cultural barriers can further impact communication challenges.

Poor diversity management, or lack-there-of, can lead to dissatisfied team members, lack of communication among team members, discrimination or stereotyping, and decreased productivity. These negative attributes, among others, can impact project success through schedule delays and increased costs. To effectively maintain diversity throughout the life of a project, the project manager should develop a diversity management plan that enables team members to reach their full potential. In addition, the communications plan developed for a project should include any cultural barriers than project stakeholders may encounter. The project
manger is responsible for monitoring the communications plan, which includes monitoring the cultural barriers.

Much like a communications plan, the diversity management plan should start by stating the purpose of the plan, the goals and objectives, stakeholder roles, and the intended approach. This information defines the reason for the plan and should emphasize the importance of diversity inclusion within the project team. A strategy should be developed for managing diversity and should be clearly defined in the plan. Strategies vary depending on the potential cultural barriers among team members. Some strategies may emphasize one or two aspects of diversity inclusion while others may encompass numerous aspects. Some aspects are creating links between different cultures, supporting individual development plans, completing assessment to determine areas for improvements related to diversity, developing action plans to address identified areas of improvement, enhance mechanisms for expressing concerns on diversity related issues, and supporting continuous diversity development (NRC, 2004).

Some cultural barriers that a project team may encounter include, but are not limited to, language barriers, nonverbal communication or body language barriers, generational barriers, religious barriers, ethical barriers, or conflict-resolution barriers. All potential barriers must be included in the diversity management plan, along with guidelines for addressing any barriers. This portion of the plan is comparable to change responses in the communications plan. For example, if a language barrier is the primary concern of a given project, a response such as adding a translator or bi-lingual employee to the project should be included.

Upon completion and acceptance, a copy of the plan must be provided to each team member. Diversity management plans are crucial to creating an environment that encourages diversity inclusion. Diversity within a project team is very important and therefore must be
effectively managed. Without proper response guidelines established, cultural barriers within a project team can have a significant impact on project success.

**Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

Diversity in the workplace provides many advantages such as improved understanding of customer base, increased productivity, greater innovation and creativity, increased skill set, improved employee on-boarding and retention, and larger talent pool (Sharma, 2016). In order to maintain such advantages, effective diversity management must be executed, monitored, and controlled. The preceding sections identify key concepts of managing diversity in the workplace and a real-world example of an administrative issue and the relation to diversity in project teams. Diversity is very important in project teams and project managers are responsible for understanding different cultures and successfully managing a diverse project team. Cultural barriers often arise in project teams as a result of diversity. Without proper response guidelines established, cultural barriers within a project team can have a significant impact on project success.

Based on the information presented above, the author recommends that SignArt project managers evaluate the diversity in their project teams and develop an effective diversity management plan. The project manager must take the time and make the effort to fully understand each culture and the background of team members. It is important to understand the diverse individuals before developing the diversity management plan. The plan should include a strategy for managing diversity that is specific to the diversity within the project team.

The diversity management plan should begin by stating the purpose of the plan, the goals and objectives, stakeholder roles, and the intended approach. This information defines the reason for the plan and should emphasize the importance of diversity inclusion within the project team.
The selected strategy should follow the introductory information. Depending on the specific project team, the author recommends that SignArt creates a strategy that improves links between different cultures, develops action plans to address identified areas of improvement, and supports continuous diversity development. All potential cultural barriers must be included in the diversity management plan, along with guidelines for addressing any barriers. SignArt’s project manager(s) must distribute a copy of the diversity management plan to each project team member and everyone understands each part of the plan. The plan must be properly executed, monitored, and controlled throughout the life of a project for success.
References


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