



A Study of Workforce Diversity Management in BPO Industry

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Abstract:

In the present paper, we tried to go through various research papers so the theoretical background of the study has been done in order to understand the variable appropriately. Since managing diversity still remains a challenge in organizations, managers tend to learn managerial skills needed in a multicultural working environment and prepares themselves to teach others about the workforce diversity. This paper gives the understanding of the different aspects of the workforce diversity and how it can affect the organizations performance in modern world. The present paper summarizes the definition of diversity, its origin, dimensions, about its reason to enfold diversity, Barriers of diversity and different diversity management principles.

Keywords:

Workforce Diversity, BPO, Employee, Organization and Management.

Introduction

Workforce diversity means similarities and differences among employees in terms of age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. No two humans are alike. People are different in not only gender, culture, race, social and psychological characteristics but also in their perspectives and prejudices. Society had discriminated on these aspects for centuries. Diversity makes the work force heterogeneous. Managing diversity can be defined as formulating and implementing the systems that can be helpful in managing the people in a way that potential advantages of diversity are maximized and potential disadvantages are minimized. Workplaces nowadays are becoming increasingly diverse with employees from different cultures, genders, races and ethnic backgrounds are working together in order to achieve the common goals and objectives. This increases the importance of formulating and implementing effective strategies in order to manage diversity at the workplace. Diversity can generally be defined as recognizing, understanding and accepting individual differences irrespective of their race, gender, age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, race. Sexual orientation, spiritual practice and so on. Grobler (2002:46) also supports this view by adding that each individual is unique but also share any number of environmental or biological characteristics

BPO Industry in India

In India, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is the fastest growing segment of the ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services) industry. Factors such as economy of scale, business risk mitigation, cost advantage; utilization improvement and superior competency have all lead to the growth of the Indian BPO industry. Business process outsourcing in India, which started around the mid-90s, has now grown by leaps and bounds. India is now the world's favoured market for BPO companies, among other competitors, such as, Australia, China, Philippines and Ireland. The BPO boom in India is credited to cheap labour costs and India's huge talent pool of skilled, English-speaking professionals. Research by the National Association of Software Services and Companies (NASSCOM) has revealed that quality orientation among leading BPO companies, 24/7 services, India's unique geographic location and the investor friendly tax structure in India have all made the BPO industry in India very popular.

Reasons for outsourcing BPO services to INDIA

- Extremely Cost-Effective
- Shared Risk Factor
- Best Quality Standards
- Proven Track Record
- Improved Customer Support
- Skilled Workforce
- Round the Clock Service
- Supportive Policies
- Faster Turnaround Time
- Updated Technology

Workforce diversity refers to the individual characteristics employees have that make them unique. The workforce diversity definition can include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, physical abilities and ideologies. Diversity also includes employees' life experiences, how they solve issues and socioeconomic status. Broadly, defined diversity management as the systematic and planned commitment by the organizations to recruits, retain, reward and promote a heterogeneous mix of employees. Theories and techniques of diversity management have been developed and enthusiastically supported by a growing number of chief executives, training specialists, diversity consultants and academics (Saji, 2004). Diversity can improve organizational effectiveness. Organizations that develop experience in and reputations for managing diversity will likely attract the best personnel. Diversity refers to the co-existence of employees from various socio-cultural backgrounds within the company. Diversity includes cultural factors such as race, gender, age, colour, physical ability, ethnicity, etc. The broader definition of diversity may include age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance and economic status.

The Importance of Workforce Diversity

Today, having a diverse workforce is important for a number of reasons:

1. **To Reflect the Community:** In order for businesses to be truly representative of the communities they serve, it is important that their workforce is diverse. This is especially important for businesses that provide services to the community, such as healthcare and education.
2. **To Retain More Employees:** A diverse workforce can help to retain employees. Employees are more likely to stay with an organization if they feel that they belong and that their unique talents and perspectives are valued.
3. **To Attract Top Talent:** A diverse and inclusive workplace is attractive to top talent. In a competitive job market, businesses need to be able to attract the best and the brightest if they want to be successful.
4. **To Address the Needs of a Changing Labour Market:** The labour market is changing and becoming more diverse. As such, businesses need to be prepared to meet the needs of a diverse workforce.
5. **To Better Understand Customers:** In order to be successful, businesses need to understand their customers. A diverse workforce can help businesses to better understand their customers and the communities they serve.
6. **To Improve Their Reputation:** A diverse and inclusive workplace is often seen as a good place to work. This can help businesses to attract new customers and to build a positive reputation.

Workplace Diversity Problems

Below are the diversity issues in the workplace.

1. Acceptance and Respect

A fundamental value that contributes to a successfully diversified workplace is respect among workers and employees. When there is a lack of acceptance of the diverse culture and beliefs among employees, conflicts may arise. Sometimes, this conflict turns to animosity and may even effectuate situations of violence. When employees accept the differences between each other, it results in a sharing of ideas and effective collaboration. Acceptance fosters mutual respect and prevents conflicts from arising. Diversity training will help employees understand, accept, and respect each other's differences.

2. Accommodation of Beliefs

Diversity in cultural, spiritual, and political beliefs can sometimes pose a challenge in a diverse workplace. Employees need to be reminded that they shouldn't impose their beliefs on others to prevent spats and disputes. They also need to make sure to keep their ethnic and personal beliefs independent of their work responsibilities and duties.

3. Ethnic and Cultural Differences

Sadly, issues from ethnic and cultural differences are still present in the workplace. There are still some individuals who hold prejudice against people who have different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds as their own. This prejudice and discrimination should never be tolerated in the workplace (or anywhere else).

Internal company policies with clear and objective regulations should be put in place to prevent employees from

demonstrating prejudice. Cultural sensitivities training and diversity awareness programs in the workplace can help address this issue.

4. Gender Equality

According to a recent survey, 40% of people believe that both men and women will hire men over women. This is supported by another study that shows that men are 30% more likely to be promoted to a managerial position than women. Additionally, men earn an approximately 24.1% higher base pay than women. In the past, women were paid less than men, but the Equal Pay Act has changed that. In recent years, there has been an influx of women in the workplace. Employers need to prevent gender discrimination and maintain equality regarding hiring, salary, opportunities, and promotions.

5. Physical and Mental Disabilities

Often, disabled employees have a difficult time navigating through their workplace because proper accommodations as simple as wheelchair ramps are not available. Some special needs employees also have service dogs, and some office buildings don't allow them inside. Make arrangements for service dogs to be permitted in your place of work. Have procedures in place for people with physical or mental disabilities. Some companies have a "quiet room" so that when employees start to feel anxious, they can use that room to ease their anxiety. Be supportive to your disabled employees and avoid discriminatory or derogatory remarks. Ensuring a fair and comfortable work environment for employees with physical and mental disabilities helps successfully create a more diverse workforce.

6. Generation Gaps

By 2025, millennial will make up 75% of the workforce, and they are changing the work culture. Employees from other generations may have difficulties adapting to changes in the workplace and the work culture that the younger generation are bringing about. In larger corporations, there are more diversified age groups, from teenagers to senior citizens. As a result, cliques and social circles may be formed, and some workers may be isolated from the team. There may also be times that workers from different generations may disagree with how things should be done. To maintain teamwork and collaboration, create an open communication culture within your organization to help bridge the gap between generations.

7. Language and Communication

Language and communication barriers are ever-present in companies with a diverse workforce. Often, US or UK companies hire people whose native tongue or first language is not English, so employees and managers sometimes have difficulties in getting their message across. This can lead to miscommunication and productivity loss. Language training for non-native English speakers can often prevent this from happening. Hiring multilingual or bilingual employees can also help bridge the gap. Increasing diversity in the workplace will benefit your company in the long run. In fact, companies with a more diverse workforce perform 35% above national industry medians.

Benefits of Managing workforce Diversity in Organization

- Diverse cultural perspectives can inspire creativity and drive innovation
- Local market knowledge and insight makes a business more competitive and profitable

- Cultural sensitivity, insight, and local knowledge means higher quality, targeted marketing
- Drawing from a culturally diverse talent pool allows an organization to attract and retain the best talent
- A diverse skills base allows an organization to offer a broader and more adaptable range of products and services
- Diverse teams are more productive and perform better
- Greater opportunity for personal and professional growth

Challenges of Managing Diversity within the Organization

- Colleagues from some cultures may be less likely to let their voices be heard
- Integration across multicultural teams can be difficult in the face of prejudice or negative cultural stereotypes
- Professional communication can be misinterpreted or difficult to understand across languages and cultures
- Navigating visa requirements, employment laws, and the cost of accommodating workplace requirements can be difficult
- Different understandings of professional etiquette
- Conflicting working styles across teams

Workforce Diversity in the Indian Context

Workforce diversity in India is the result of both constitutional provisions and political circumstances based on the social anthropological compulsion of the country (Monappa 1997). Diversity is an inexorable thing in India. India is an exceptional representation of a land where diversity exists in all aspects through a unification of religions, beliefs, languages and castes among individuals from different communities. AS elsewhere in the world, the composition of workforce diversity is changing in India too. The facet of workforce diversity has been gaining acceptance as an area of strategic interest for all the organizations. Rapid industrialization and globalization have imposed the need to understand the importance of utilizing the diverse pool of talent in India. There have been comprehensive studies in western nations on workforce diversity, but there has been less research on understanding the factors that impact workforce diversity in India.

Employee Perception on Workforce Diversity

The study sought to establish the perception of employees at the impact of workforce diversity on employee performance in the BPO organizations. In this study of understanding diverse workforce in the BPO organizations, it was assumed that being a multinational organization, it must be having a wide range of diverse workforce and also policies must be retained by HR Department to manage such diverse workforce effectively. Employees were asked with such questions to know their awareness about various workforce diversity parameters, do they exist in their organization, does workforce diversity play any role in their performance and do they feel themselves as valued member of the organization. Stress was laid upon the four basic parameters of workforce diversity, i.e., age diversity, gender diversity, ethnicity diversity and education background diversity. Through questionnaire employees' views have been gathered with respect to age, gender, education background and ethnicity of workforce. Many companies today pursue diversity by itself as a priceless asset. But our research shows that they cannot realize and sustain the full value of that diversity—enabling diverse talent to thrive, fully contribute, progress, and want to stay—without a truly inclusive culture. Organizations understand that having a diverse workforce pays off—or should pay off—by stimulating innovation and challenges to the status quo from different points of view. But the only way to realize these and other benefits of diversity is to continuously progress toward a more inclusive environment for all team members.

Sangeeta Jain in her book, "Quality of Working Life" felt that QWL inherent in any organization will have a strong determining impact on group behaviour. Further, she felt that group coherence of any group may be a direct result of the extent of QWL present in the working environment.

Why management focus on managing diversity at workplace

Corporate diversity and inclusion are a hot topic and for good reason. Find out why diversity is important and crucial for companies looking to gain a serious advantage over their competitors.

- Boosts Employee Engagement
- Boosts Productive Performance
- Increases Skills and Knowledge
- Fosters Creativity and Innovation
- Faster Problem Solving
- Easier Recruitment
- Understand Customers Better
- Reduces Employee Turnover
- Raises Profits
- Boosts Company Reputation
- Reduces Conflicts

Focus of the Study

The research seeks the attention of employees as the research is done in BPO sector of Hyderabad with a view to find the impact of workforce diversity on employee's performance. BPO/IT / ITES industries are considered to be the lifeline of Indian economy. After liberalization, the BPO/ ITES sector has achieved a tremendous growth. India has been able to influence the global market by being a knowledge-based industry with highly talented pool of engineers. Today, BPO/ITES industry has gained brand distinctiveness as a knowledge economy due to its IT and ITES sector in the world. The industry has employed almost 15 million Indians and has fuelled economic growth of the country. It's quite prevalent to globally hire people of different age groups, education levels, races, religions and genders. Therefore, this leads to a heterogeneity workforce in this industry which gives us scope to gauge the effects of these different heterogeneity factors on employee performance and organizational performance as a whole.

How workforce diversity management in BPO industry:

Diversity is looked upon as an effective way to draw new employees who bring a wide range of talents, perspectives and problem-solving skills to the company. Diversity is considered the building block of any organizational structure which aides in creating a healthy work environment and helps create a culture of unilateral innovative thinking gives the organization a competitive edge. BPO Industry company caters to the needs of customers across various geographical regions, race, gender and ethnicity. Inclusivity actions have evolved from individual programs to culture-changing organizational efforts. A Forward-thinking leaders, , have found investing in diversity and inclusion as part of their overall organizational practices has an overall positive impact. At an organization level it believes that workforce diversity is an asset to be leveraged as it brings with it diversity of thought, resulting in increased potential for innovative solution finding and enhanced performance. Customers, suppliers and strategic partners are becoming increasingly global and multi-cultural. It is important for an organization to position itself to communicate with and market to a diverse population. Competition to attract and retain top talent is increasing. Support for diversity and inclusion is required to become an employer of choice and to attract, develop and retain key skills.

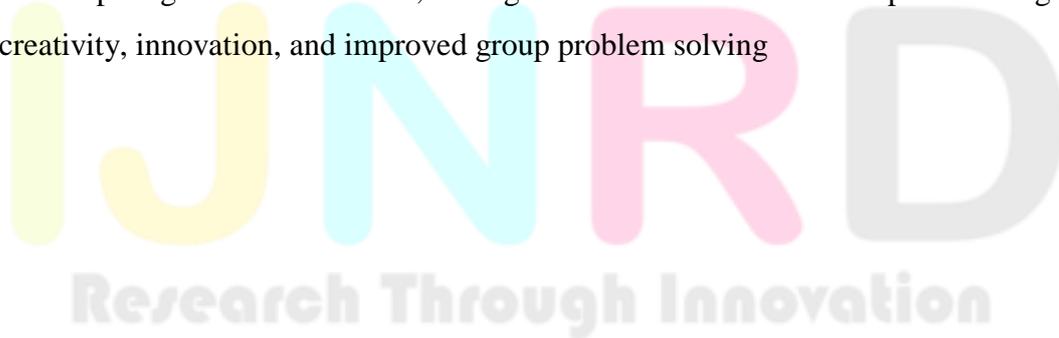
Following ways have BPO companies realized benefits from employee diversity

Exclusion, by nature, is considered depletion in resource, while inclusion aggregates and expands value. Several studies and much industry data have proven diversity in the management team is a contributor to success of corporations and economies. The need for gender inclusivity is well recognized and the BPM industry has been at the forefront of attracting, retaining and growing women into leadership positions. Currently, approximately 31% of the IT-BPO workforce is women. While IT/BPO are way ahead of other industries in the organized sector, but when we stack up the numbers, less than 6% of them are in top leadership positions. Moving beyond gender, companies now must focus on cultural and generational/age-related inclusivity, and on people with disabilities. Sexual orientation acceptance, religious beliefs and festival harmony are just some of the topics that need to be addressed in BPM companies to ensure maximum inclusion.

Current state of Workforce Diversity in BPO industry and professionals views:

Progressive organisations know that creating an inclusive environment contributes to business results. More diverse organisations are typically more innovative and often outperform the competition. Moreover, with millennials' share in the workforce rapidly increasing – and expected to reach three-fourths of the total by 2025 – building a diverse team is not a choice but a business necessity. Understanding best-in-class standards and knowing where one stands relative to peers is a crucial first step. Diversity and inclusion have taken on greater prominence for companies in India in recent years, with more firms wanting to build an equitable workplace. Experts at the recent SHRM India Annual Conference 2021 discussed how the scenario has evolved and shared tips for using a "bottoms-up approach" to help organizations become more diverse. The speakers stressed the need to build a culture in which people from different backgrounds receive equal opportunities and feel included.

Reasons to adapt & accept workforce diversity and its management Because of the expansion in the assorted workforce at working environment made it mandatory for each association to improve overseeing approaches and procedures to abuse the advantages of a various employees in organizations supportable development. Ongoing examinations have indicated a solid relationship between's acceptable variety practices and gainfulness of the associations. Variety authorizes extended revolution, an extra wide choice of viewpoints, enhanced subject definition, more other options and improved measures (Adler, 1986). Controlled Workforce Diversity adequately absolutely disturbs upper hand. Upper hand is a module of procedure that gives an association a unique fitness. This skill and bit of leeway initiate from the cycle wherein the supervision of variety absolutely impacts hierarchical manner and adequacy (Kreitner and Kinichi, 2004). To receive these rewards, variety must be overseen successfully. Overseeing variety implies empowering assorted workforce to play out its extreme ability in a unbiased place of work where nobody specific gathering has a favorable position or detriment (Torres and Bruxelles, 1992) Konrad (2003) cited three primary reasons for an organization's to go for diversity at the workplace- competing for the best talent, having a diverse workforce to compete in the global economy, and increasing creativity, innovation, and improved group problem solving



Issues & Challenges while managing workforce diversity within the organization

Patrick and Kumar (2012) researched the topic, "Managing Workplace Diversity: Issues and Challenges". According to researchers, diversity supervision is a step-by-step affair intended to create as well as nourish the optimistic workplace surroundings in which the commonness of the personnel and also their difference of opinions are certainly valued. Under this study employee from the IT, the organization was considered. The researchers laid out five objectives to increase awareness of diversification and to explore the attitude towards this concept in the IT sector. A convenience sampling technique was used by the researchers to select the sample. A sample size of 350 employees from the IT organization was selected by the researchers for the fulfillment of the study's purpose. In the current study, the researchers will use a questionnaire for the collection of data. Various quantitative techniques were used by the researcher for data analysis such as 1) descriptive, 2) t-test, 3) one-way ANOVA, 4) Mann-Whitney test, 5) Kruskal-Wallis test with the help of SPSS software. 32.3 percent of the sample were quite had an optimistic attitude towards diversification while 67.7 percent had a realistic attitude towards the same. Various barriers like discrimination, backlash, ethnocentrism, etc. were found out during the analysis. In the end, researchers suggested covering religion-based groups and marginalized groups for future studies.

Research Gaps An organization's originality, innovativeness, & performance is enhanced through a diverse workforce. Different literature on workforce diversity has been reviewed to understand the scope and depth of the theme. The researches on workforce diversity developed in past years yet there are some fields which are still to be researched. "The current research highlight "the impact of workforce diversity on the management in the organization and employee performance, perception, outlook approach in the Indian BPO Industry. "Literature review revealed that abundant studies all ears on managing diversity, workforce diversity, and its effect on employee performance and workforce diversity and its impact on organization performance but there are very few researches conducted on workforce diversity and its impact on the employee as well as organization performance simultaneously". Further, there are minimal researches conducted in the BPO/ITES Sector of the Hyderabad state on workforce diversity management approach in the BPO industries together.

So, with the help of literature review, we begin some research gap, which revealed that there are research studies conducted to measure the influence between diversity in the workforce upon employee performance and the influence on organizational performance independently & few research studies conducted in the ITES/BPO sector but not in the Hyderabad region of India especially with both management approach and employee approach. Further, no studies were performed toward the Management and employee outlook on the workforce diversity in all consulting and software IT /BPO companies since these are the most revenue-generating companies; working in the Hyderabad region of India.

Summary & Conclusion:

Diversity within the workforce has gained significant momentum in recent years. Nonetheless, diversity is not just limited to ethnic and cultural differences. In addition to cultural differences, there is a generation gap that

employees must bridge as a result of diversity. Since the leaders and managers are aware of the progress they may accomplish if they are successful in assembling a team of experienced and young responsive individuals, every firm seeks to hire young inventive brains to join the team of experienced individuals. However, the issue with acceptability and execution is what makes most workplace diversity strategies unsuccessful. The secret to handling challenges at work is figuring out the right strategy. In this concern, the findings of the current study strategically helped in outlining the level of acceptance of diversity among employees of different age groups, gender, experience and marital status and their workforce diagnosis. This affirmed that the acceptance levels across groups were uniform and positive towards workplace diversity. Further, the study aimed at analysing the impact of diversity and management strategies to develop an organisation on business deliverables and their success. For this objective, it was found that the commitment level of the management was strategically different towards workplace diversity practices. This reflects that the overall outlook of the management and particularly senior managers differs with regard to workplace diversity and hence, it may have strategically different outcomes on organisational attributes and its success as a whole. Finally, the study focused on identifying the strategies or harness synergy among workers in the industry and future relations. In this context, findings acquired through the quantitative survey revealed that strategies like providing fair monetary rewards and compensations; encouraging employee feedback to ensure clarity; encouraging active employee participation; creating awareness of healthy work relationships; frequently organising training, seminars and workshops; focusing on building good workplace relationships, emphasizing on long term employee relationships and so on were undertaken for ensuring harnessing synergy among the workers within the industry as well as maintaining long-term future relations with them.

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Suggestions:

- It is critical to change the phrasing in all job descriptions to gender-neutral terms. For instance often "he/his/him" is used as the default pronoun. However, this creates an impression that a given gender is preferred. Hence, it is critical to change them to "they" or another gender-neutral term.
- Blind screenings should be used to reduce unconscious biases throughout the resume assessment process. Studies have revealed that even if applicants are similarly competent, those with stereotypically "ethnic" names must submit more resumes before receiving a call back. Additionally, applications with feminine names are scored lower than those with masculine names.
- Furthermore, it is essential to stop using "cultural fit" as an excuse to pass over candidates. Unconscious bias is frequently at work when interviewers seek to reject prospects based on "cultural fit" or a "gut feeling." To find hidden prejudices and have honest talks about them, the organisation must ask its interviewees to provide a more detailed explanation. Never chastise or humiliate someone since this might trigger unproductive reactions.
- Make sure to include employees from underrepresented groups in the organisation's recruitment process. Nonetheless, they should not be overburdened either. Thus, efforts must be made to create a balance and ensure recruitment that meets the goals of the firms.
- A monitoring and regulating committee should be made in the organisation to ensure that the diverse workforce is being fairly recruited, treated and nurtured within the firm. Mere development of policies without effective implementation will have no strategic benefits for the firm.
- Allowing the staff to choose their own hours will demonstrate to them that the organisation has confidence in their ability to complete the task. People's ability to adhere to a rigid 9 to 5 schedule may be impacted by a variety of personal circumstances (like picking up or dropping off children at school). Because of the extremely tough lives that some employees lead as a result of a lack of flexibility, they may decide to leave for a firm that can offer it.
- Since so much of the talent pool is looking for a secure, welcoming environment where they may produce their best work, diversity attracts variety. So that potential applicants may learn about a genuine viewpoint, it is critical to inquire about the existing workers from underrepresented groups to write about their experiences working within the organisation.

Contribution of the study:

In the fiercely competitive climate of today, diversity is crucial. Enhancing productivity excellence is now a strategic goal of organisations rather than a societal or governmental necessity. As the name implies, diversity fosters variety. This diversity is guaranteed by a range of ideas, philosophies, knowledge, experience, and cultures, as well as by differences in gender, age, and other demographic traits. The kind of solutions and productivity presented by the individuals represent their knowledge and expertise. Even more so in the present, when there is a hybrid model of both traditional and conventional working cultures, there is limited empirical evidence available with regard to the advantages, problems, consequences, and actions that may be taken to improve diversity in organisations. As a result, the current study contributes on both theoretical and practical fronts. Theoretically, the findings of the study will help in fulfilling the significant gap in the research with regard to workplace diversity. Practically, the findings of the current study assist in outlining the key benefits and challenges of adopting workplace diversity strategies. Moreover, the measures suggested in the current study can be practically adopted to achieve better outcomes within the organisations.

Future scope of the study:

Based on the limitations and findings of the current study, it can be accentuated that there are significant steps that need to be taken for enhancing the scope and application of workplace diversity.

- In this regard, it can be highlighted that primarily, future research should be undertaken to evaluate the impact of workplace diversity on employee performance and innovative behaviour when supported by top management. This will help in outlining the extent to which workplace diversity is essential for levitating organisational performance. Moreover, it will also help in deciphering if top management plays a critical role in ensuring the effective implementation of workplace diversity strategies.
- Secondly, future research should also be undertaken for evaluating the extent to which workplace diversity is correlated with employee engagement and further what its impact on job satisfaction levels. This is essential to understand whether a high engagement level positively helps in moderating the impact of workplace diversity practices within the organisation and their job satisfaction levels.
- Further, the study recommends that future research should be conducted for highlighting the key aspects that can help in enhancing workforce diversity within the firm.
- Potential research should also be undertaken for highlighting the extent to which workforce diversity can help to achieve the goals of sustainability and organisational effectiveness.