

UNDERSTANDING THE WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND ITS DIMENSIONS- A LITERATURE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The workforce composition in modern organizations is characterized by diversity. This may be attributed to factors like globalization, government regulations, increase in immigration, market composition, socio-economic factors etc. This presupposes a need to review the human resource management practices to develop new and creative approaches to unleash the various talents / capabilities of diverse population in these organizations. Organizational experience evidences efforts of diverse workforce for quiet long. However, diversity as a concept is being recognized and is in its infancy. Studies in this direction have been attempted but they are available in isolation. However this scholarly approach to diversity management has not been focused in the same measure as diversity management in practice. This thus evidences a gap between theory and practice and thus needing studies in the direction. This paper is an attempt to scan the available literature so as to identify the various dimensions of diversity and their impact on individual and organization outcomes. Studies spanning these and other issues raised by scholars are examined and analyzed to not only understand the direction of research in diversity practice leading to theoretical sophistication but also help the manager to comprehend the issues of diversity management for effective human resource management .

Key words: Diversity, Diversity management, Dimensions of diversity, literature.

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INTRODUCTION

The workforce composition in modern organizations is characterized by diversity. This change in the workforce make-up is attributed to a myriad of environmental trends such as globalization of firms (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), change in demographics (Loo, 1999), MNC's becoming common place (Bhadury et al., 2000) legal requirement, advancement of technology (Appelbaum et al. 1998), increased competition (Robinson and Dechat, 1997; Taylor, 1995), inclusion being viewed as social responsibility (Cox, 1991), diverse consumers base (Cox, 1991), endeavor to be employer of choice (Doherty 2004).

Diversity

Diversity is defined as "the presence of differences among members of a social unit" (Jackson et al., 1995). The term has received significance as organizations worldwide become more diverse in terms of the gender, race, ethnicity, age, national origin and other personal characteristics (Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1998). The workforce comprises people who are different and share different attitudes, needs, desires, values and work behaviors (Deluca and McDowell, 1992; Morrison, 1992; Rosen and Lovelace, 1991). Therefore understanding and managing diversity has become crucial to the viability of contemporary organizations (Cox and Blake, 1991). The concept as such has been there for about 2 decades but the practice on ground with focus on encouraging diversity in the organizations is of the post-globalised era. This practice has created interest among the scholars to conceptualize the efforts of the practitioners on ground, thus resulting in studies in this direction. While many organizations have sought to increase diversity in their workforce, however attempts by researchers, have met with mixed results (Chatman et al., 1998). Studies have found both positive and negative outcomes of diversity.

Studies were thus conducted on several issues relating to diversity. Studies drawn on Social – categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979), and the similarity – attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) have shown that diverse workgroups compared to homogeneous groups suffer more from poor cohesion and social integration (Hambrick, 1994), conflict, turnover, low trust, low job satisfaction, stress, absenteeism, and communication difficulties (Alder, 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1989; Tsui et al., 1992; Zenger and Lawrence, 1989) Also, people different from their co-workers in terms of race, gender, tenure, and other characteristics report feelings of discomfort and less organizational commitment (Tsui et al., 1992)

Mean while other studies drawn from resource based view of organization have suggested that innovation and creativity can be enhanced by diversity due to difference in experience, knowledge and abilities(Cox, 1991; Jackson et al., Alder, 1997, Friday and Friday , 2003).Further openness to diverse others, have been found to produce favorable organizational outcomes such as performance, organizational commitment, jobsatisfaction, satisfaction with managers, career commitment, and career satisfaction(Hickes-Clarke and Iles, 2000; McKay et al., 2008).

Diversity management

Studies claim that there is need to manage diversity efficiently benefit from the diverse workforce at organization. Diversity management is defined as “planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized” (Cox, 1993) Planning and implementing organizational systems and practices for managing diversity calls for identifying the dimensions which bring in the diversity at the workplace.

Dimensions of diversity

Literature evidences various dimensions such as race, geographic origin, ethnicity, gender, age, functional oreducational background, physical and cognitive capability, language, lifestyles, beliefs, cultural background, economic category, tenure with the organization and sexual preference (Dessler, 1998; Galagan, 1991; Bhadury et al., 2000).

Each dimension influences individual’s attitude and perception. This further adds to complexity when they interact with others and thus affecting the organization outcomes. Thus it becomes vital to understand each dimension of diversity. Researchers have made an attempt to classify these dimensions and categorize them. The table below shows three categories of dimension, available in the literature.

Category	Characteristics	Dimensions	Impact
DETECTABLE (Jackson et al., 1995) /VISIBLE or SURFACE LEVEL(Pelled, 1996a; Harrison et al., 2002).	-determined quickly and with a high degree of consistency by others - Only brief exposure or interaction is required -understood as overt, biological attributes	culture ,age, race, sex, and organizational tenure	When individuals are open to visiblediversity, they show no discriminatory attitudes towards those who look different, e.g. are of a different

	<p>which are immediately observable and provide strong bases for social categorization (Jackson et al., 1993; Timmerman, 2000)</p> <p>-representative of the surface-level of demographic heterogeneity (Harrison et al., 1998)</p>		<p>gender, race, or age group.</p>
<p>UNDERLYING (Jackson et al., 1995)/ INVISIBLE or DEEP LEVEL (Pelled, 1996a; Harrison et al., 2002).</p>	<p>-not so easily or quickly determined by others</p> <p>- require more time and interaction to become known by others</p> <p>- deep-level type of diversity (Tyran and Gibson, 2008)</p>	<p>skills, abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and values</p>	<p>Openness to other individuals' different values is tolerance for differences in opinions, world view, and cultural behaviors.</p>
<p>FUNCTIONAL (Pelled, 1996a; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998)</p>	<p>represents the variations in knowledge that are often described as the true value of diversity (Ely and Thomas, 2001)</p>	<p>skills and knowledge</p>	<p>When individuals show openness to informational diversity, they are inclusive of different information and different sources of knowledge available within the group (Homan et al., 2007).</p>

Table 1: Classification of diversity dimensions

Among the three categories of dimensions identified in the table above, detectable/visible /surface level dimensions have got more attention in the literature. Major detectable/visible /surface dimensions that have received scholarly attention across the world in available literature, which influence organization are-

- (1) Culture (language)
- (2) Age;
- (3) Gender;
- (4) Sexual orientation

THE STUDY

Much of this research examines the effects of these dimensions on organizational outcomes and has reported mixed findings. This paper attempts to provide an exploratory review seeking to find out the various dimensions of diversity, through rigorous analysis of the available literature. The literature from academic publications on diversity management from across the world is critiqued from the available electronic searches of the popular database and research journals. Studies spanning the issues over the various dimensions raised by scholars are examined. Further they are analyzed to understand the reasons for each dimension to seek scholarly attention and their impact on organization and individual outcomes. The literature on major dimensions is organized and presented to inform and create path between the previous and future research.

Observing the relevant literature, it is found that there has been extensive discussion on cultural diversity as significant criterion. Most of the countries now have a multicultural makeup in terms of demographic structure (Loo, 1999), where the employees come in contact with people from diversified cultural background, involving language, norms, lifestyle etc (Zakaria, 2000; Montaglian & Giacalone 1998). This requires dealing with cultural diversity and problems regarding this-matters of motivation, leadership, productivity, authority etc (Higgs, 1996). Culture impacts the management style, communication style, attitudes, behavior and perception of individuals and groups (Frey-Ridgway, 1997; Karoc-kakasbadra & Kaouzmin, 2001; Mwaina et al., 1998).

Cultural Dimension

Cultural diversity generally refers to cultural heterogeneity such as differences in race, ethnicity, and national origin (Cox and Blake, 1991; Jackson, 1992). Relevant literature evidences two diametrically opposite views on cultural diversity. The views favoring cultural diversity argue that culturally mixed workforce holds a potential competitive advantage for organization (Cox &

Blake, Amandrell &). Moreover culturally diverse, transnational project teams play a great role in making novelties and increasing flexibilities in globally competitive market (Hayes, 1997). Further studies acknowledge cultural diversity at organizations helps, to serve diverse clients better (Wright and Noe, 1996), to recognize the different markets better, diminish cost by reducing workforce turnover rate (Ozkalp & Kiel, 2000, Harung and Harung 1995) and brings competitive advantage to organizations by increasing creativity and problem solving (Copeland, 1998; Cox 1991). And Organizations embracing cultural diversity endeavor to dominate pluralism & ethno relativity in the organizations (Datt, 2003).

Contradicting the above arguments, there are views that cultural diversity can increase the ambiguity, complexity and confusion in groups (Chevrier, 2003) and incomplete information about cultural structure can lead to wrong evaluation in performance evaluation, measurement and decision making (Akon, 2000; Deniz, 2000)

Studies reconciling the above views acknowledge that cultural diversity well managed can be an asset or if mismanaged, may diminish the performance (Dadfar & Gustaavmann, 1992) and the impact would depend on type of diversity climate (Bhadury et al, 2000) rather than diversity itself. Therefore there is need for differentiation, and its integration (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) i.e. the coexistence two opposite qualities, diversity and unity, kept together, for a strong individual and strong organization (Harung and Harung, 1995)

Many studies suggest that a common organization culture is a necessity (Tan 2002; Kidger, 2002; Randelesome, 2002) to manage cultural diversity as it would acculturate employees around common values, developing cohesion and unity leading to success of organization (Dadfar & Gustaman, 1992). Further Socialization of expatriates (Palthe, 2004), in-service training program (Foxman and Polsky), motivation & pre-departure preparation program (Simeon & Fuijo, 2000) have been identified as HRM policies and practices that foster openness to cultural diversity.

Other studies on this dimension reveal that developing cross-cultural leadership (Thomas, 1998; Kahn, 1999; Yukl, 2002; Shelton et al., 2002), developing strong work ethic (Anderson and Bostian, 2001; Bock & Greco, 2002) trust and commitment (Bear & Bostian, 2002) new work configurations (Koonce, 2001) and work life balance (Carvel, 2001) have been identified challenges to achieving inclusion of cultural diversity. (75)

Most of the cross-cultural studies are drawn taking in account Hofstede's dimensions of culture, of which the most the most important dimension of cultural difference identified is the relative emphasis on individualism vs. collectivism (Triandis, 1990).

Further, Multicultural organizations are often also multilingual organizations (Barner & Bjorkman, 2007). Language as an element of culture has been viewed to have significant influence in the socialization in the organizations and has got consideration of scholars.

Language dimension

Linguistic diversity represents the communicative dimension of dissimilarity (Jonsen et al. 2011). The presence of a multitude of speakers of different national languages in the same work group has been referred as language diversity (Henderson, 2005). This has gained academic attention due to the importance of communication in organizational management and collaboration process (Taylor & Cooren, 1997) and dysfunctional group formations, social fragmentation and lowering the rhetorical capacities of individual in diverse settings due to language diversity (Feely and Harzing, 2003).

There are evidences from literature that language diversity leads to communication barriers (Henderson, 2005), difficulty in sharing knowledge and developing social relations (Welch & Welch 2008). This will refrain interactions leading to large social distances (Johnsen & Lederer, 2005). In contrast, to the above studies a recent study shows that there is strong relationship between language diversity and openness to the linguistic diversity, due to strong positive relation between communication frequency and language diversity (Jakob and Jan, 2012). This is because each cycle of exchange reveals underlying differences or agreements allowing for adjustments and minor alterations to knowledge and perspectives (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981), develop trust, reduce social and cultural barriers (Johnsen & Lederer, 2005). This is in line with contact hypothesis (Amir, 1969) which suggests that the more contact a person has with dissimilar others, the more positive his or her attitudes will be towards such persons.

Linguistic element of diversity perceived important as it is essential in understanding knowledge sharing and performance (Musson and Cohen, 1999) as language dissimilarities can be driver of uneven patterns of interaction and knowledge sharing in multicultural setting (Makela et al, 2007). Studies reveal that introducing common language can improve shared understanding, communication flow and information flow (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 199a; Welch et al

.,2001;Dhir and Goke Pariola,2002), avoid social categorization and linguistic clustering (Dhir and Goke Pariola,2002 ; Feely and Harzing, 2003) by increasing communication frequency (Triandis.1960;Tushmanand Nadler, 1978),creating common frame of reference(Zenger and Lawrence, 1989), guiding how individuals interpret ,understand and respond to information(Lawrence, 1989).

There are arguments in literature against common language stating that second language is a less rich means of communication compared to one's native language(Feely and Harzing, 2003)and lacking proficiency in the common language may make it harder to establish a strong frame of reference (Zenger and Lawrence, 1989)thus refrain individuals from the a small talk providing important personal information(Langerstrom and Andersson,2003).In such situations , one may see the locals use their national language for the purposes of informal communication and networking , which undermines the status of the common language while marginalizing members who do not speak the local language(Charles and Marschan Piekkari, 2002).But studies support the usage of common language with an argument that increase in interaction may assist in improving the common language as it will contribute to the development of common language and jargon(Zenger and Lawrence, 1989).Further it is supported with Faultline theory , predicting that while the existence of two language group could lead to negative group categorization , a much larger collection of native languages would force individual group members to more regularly use the common organizational language(Lau and Murnighan, 1989)

The analysis underlines that existence of multi languages has been portrayed as an obstacle. Introducing a corporate language is considered as a panacea to bring the organization under one umbrella and this can prove worthy to organization in long run as communication frequency increases. There exist very few studies on communication and language use in multicultural organizations and there are hardly any large scale studies. More research is needed in order to reach thorough understanding of the concept.

Gender Dimensions

As evident by observing the available literature, gender dimension has been into discussion at large, just next to the culture. With the increase in the women in the workforce due to change in demographics and impulse of employers to utilize the untapped talent, this dimension has been explored by both researchers and practitioners. There is plenty theoretical discussion over this dimension in the literature relevant to equality, gender studies, sociology andmanagement but

scanty empirical studies are available.

Studies claim that corporations can gain advantage by being receptive to the potential women (Fernandez, 1993; Morrison, 1992; Schwartz, 1992). Supporting this claim there are acknowledgements that corporate reputations were enhanced by the visible presence of women on the board (Appold et al., 1998 and Bilimoria, 2000), and some major investors (such as large pension funds) showed a preference to invest in firms demonstrating diversity in board appointments. Burke (2000) also notes that women can add important symbolic value both inside and outside the organization, linking the firm with other constituencies.

There have been found sundry findings about firms' performance and presence of women in top management teams. Few studies show a positive relation (Adler, 2001; Erhardt et al., 2003; Catalyst, 2004; Veleva, 2005) whereas others find negative associations (Ryan and Haslam, 2005) or no association whatsoever (Kochan et al., 2003).

Dearth of association can be attributed to the fact that the number of women is an influencing criteria as evident from few studies. A small number of female (less than 15 percent of a unit) is just considered as 'token' (Kanter, 1993) and is not adequate to make impact as they are just considered as symbols. Their presence is ignored and is subjected to negative treatment. (Rosener, 1995) Further another study also found that firm performance increased with female participation up to a maximum of 50 percent in the workforce (in a sample of 291 US firms from several sectors), after which it decreased. (Frink et al. (2003)

There are claims in literature that besides, the number or percentage of women on boards, another similar barrier is the status of these appointed women in comparison to their male colleagues, is less power and lower earnings than men (Zelechowski and Bilimoria, 2000). Studies also reveal that men with more status than women working in female-dominated groups are more negatively affected by sex dissimilarity and are more inclined to categories on sex basis (Chattopadhyay, 1999). In contrast, since women are used to working in male-dominated groups sex may not be as salient as categorization dimension for them (George and Chattopadhyay, 2002)

Generational dimension

Generational diversity has its earliest origin in literature of sociology, with emphasis on

importance of generations as a guide in understanding structure of social and intellectual movements (Manheim, 1952). In the field of management, the idea of “generation” has been widely adopted by marketing scholars and practitioners for segmenting the market (Noble and Schewe 2003).

In the literature, “generation” is defined as identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical development stages (Kupperschmidt 2000). However, in many studies (Manheim, 1952; Gilleard 2004; Edmunds & Turner 2002; Eyerman & Turner 1998; Turner 1998; Holdbrook & Schindler 1989, 1994; Schuman & Scott 1989) significant life events at critical development stage/ certain common experience shared, has been considered most influential element among the components of the broad definition of “generation”. This component is called “cohort” and been defined as the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same event within the same time interval (Ryder, 1965).

Various researchers (Smith and Clurman, 1997; Meredith and Schewe, 1994; Zemke et al, 2000) have made an attempt to classify the generations but the standard approach assumed in most of the studies in the west is that of four generations of Veterans, Baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y proposed by Hammill (2005). There are evidences from studies that these four groups differ in their work values (Lyons et al, 2007; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Woong et al, 2008; Chen & Choi, 2008; Gursoy et al, 2008; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Broadbridge et al, 2007; Terjesen et al, 2007; Twengwe & Campbell, 2008). In contradictory, few studies show that there was no difference (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Gentry et al., 2009) or few differences (Parker & Chusmir, 1990; Davis et al, 2006) in work value among the groups.

These age-related influences in work values could be considered as constituted of cohort effect, age effect and period effect (Rhodes 1983). These difference can lead to conflicts in generations at workplace, can influence recruitment (Charrier 2000), training and development (Berl 2006; Tulgan 1996) career development (Ansoorian et al) rewards (Carlson 2004) management style (Loyk, 1997; Tulgan 1996) and generate generational conflict (Karp & Sirias, 2001). Thus basis for the assumption that different generations need to be managed differently (Gursoy et al, 2008).

Moreover, studies comparing generational difference in values in US with Japan (Murphy et al, 2004), Taiwan (Hui-Chun & Miller), China (Ralston et al, 1999), Brazil and Russia (Schewe &

Meredith, 2004) suggest that the generational characteristics and structure are not the same in all parts of world as west, giving rise to the assumption that generations should be conceptualized as being within a particular national context(Mannheim,1965). Further it has been proposed from literature that there exists more heterogeneity within a generation than between generations(Denecker et al, 2008) due to gender differences (Parker & Chusmir, 1990;Terjesen et al,2007)ethnic differences(Lippmann,2008) regional difference (Griffin 2004),differences in collective memories due to education(Schuman & Rogers, 2004)which adds to complexity involved in defining generational groups (Denecker et al, 2008).

As several generations of employees are in the workforce together managers should be encouraged to deal with generational difference (Smola& Sutton, 2002) and understanding these generational differences may be a tool that managers can use to create more employee productivity, innovation and corporate citizenship (Kupperschmidt, 2000).Leveraging generational strengths can boast morale control costs, reduce turnover and increase sales and profits.(Lancaster & Stillman,2002).

Some studies have reported positive effects of this diversity on performance (Kilduff, Angelmar& Mehra,2000),while others have found either no significant effects (Bunderson & Sutcliffe,2002; Simons, Pelled& Smith,1999) or negative effects(Ely 2004; Leonard, Levine & Joshi,2004;Timmerman,2000;Zenger & Lawrence,1989) The negative effect is contributed to the fact that heightened level of diversity may lead to perception of discriminatory treatment (Avery, Mckay& Wilson, 2008).

Literature relevant to age and job values acknowledge that age has positive relation to job satisfaction and job related values(Rhodes 1983)but not found true with females and minority (Lyness& Thompson,1997;Stroh, Brett& Reilly,1992). The difference has been attributed to difficulty to entering organizations and overcoming barriers (Lyness& Thompson, 1997; Powell, Butterfield&Parents, 2002; Raggins, 1997). This relation has argument that job satisfaction in each generation is influenced by gender(Lyness& Thompson,1997;Stroh, Brett& Reilly,1992),education(Sicherman& Galor,1990;Strober,1990) and socio-demographic background(Sicherman,1990).Further there can be unique and additional variance in many job attitudes due to alternative measures of age as “relative age”(Milliken & Martins,1996; Riordan& Shore ,1997) and “subjective age”(Cleveland& Shore 1992)

Generational differences are important because generations originate from different values,

attitudes, ambitions and mind-sets of people (Zemke et al, 2000). This generational interaction can be both positive and negative. On the one hand the sharing of different perspectives across generations fosters creativity and innovation (Meredith et al, 2002) On the other hand; negative interaction comes from clash points when misunderstanding between generations creates unnecessary personal and organizational conflict (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002)

Sexual Orientation Dimension

A new dimension of diversity which has been said to be the “last acceptable bias”(Sullivan ,2004) has filtered into the workforce of Europe, Australia, parts of North America and South Africa .Sexual orientation equality and diversity work has been triggered by social justice , legislative and business case requirements (Colgan et al.,2007;Stonewall, 2008a,b;Trau and Hartel, 2004) despite oppositions(Thompson, 2006)

This segment of population has emerged as visible strand in diversity management in the organizations and has got scholarly attention as it is large enough to be important to labor and consumer market evident from the literature from America which reveals that 10% of the population (Nelson, 2002) are Gays and Lesbians, distributed across different races, ethnicities, classes, industries and occupations (Zuckerman & Simons, 1996).

It is revealed from studies that the presence of Gays and Lesbians in a labor market has a positive correlation with creativity and innovation (Florida, 2002) with a speculation that communities that tolerate diversity are more open to new ideas. Also few studies claim GL Americans that they are economically and educationally more elite (Powers& Ellis, 1995).These evidences from literature support the organizations championing sexual orientation triggered by business case requirement.

Further job discrimination (Rostoky & Riggle, 2002) and potential violence directed because of sexual orientation(Zuckerman & Simons,1996) are the threats to this element of diversity at the workplace as this makes them less likely to open about their orientation and hold positive work attitudes (Buton ,2001)thereby increasing the cost of lost productivity (Poe,1996).

There is empirical evidence that homosexuals perceive safe to work in the organizations with antidiscrimination policies including sexual orientation (Rostoky & Riggle, 2002) and are more committed if perceive that top management supports it (Day& Schoenrade, 2000).They prefer to work in large organizations than small (Day & Greene, 2008) perhaps as recognized that large

firms are likely to have formal policies (Child, 1973).

For large organizations working globally developing sophisticated approach to policy making of mainstreaming equity and diversity policies in a “sensitive” area where differing national cultural customs, tradition and legislative framework exists is a challenge (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008). This confirms that there would exist complexity in diversity management in global organizations as it has to consider global, national and local conditions.

Psychological Dimension

Psychological diversity refers to differences in underlying attributes of members, which include human features like skills, abilities, personality characteristics, and attributes (Landy and Conte, 2004). The studies on this dimension of diversity are very scanty. Few Scholars working on team performance have shown that psychological diversity affects team interaction. Research in this direction seeks attention as there has been an increasing shift from work organized around individual jobs to team –based work structures.

Studies have reported that Personality traits of team members are important predictors of team performance (Burchfield, 1997, Huszco, 1996). A study reveals that team composition in terms of personality traits (Big Five Personality traits), need for achievement and emotional intelligence plays an important role in enhancing the processes (team viability, workload sharing, cohesion, member flexibility and communication) of work teams (Olukayode and Benjamin, 2005) The impact of Psychological diversity on team performance is dependent on the type of task performed (Jehn et al., 1999).

Conclusion

Diversity in the organizations is inevitable and organizations should formulate appropriate policies and improvise them, decreasing the negative sides of diversity and bringing the advantageous side in the foreground by examining them one by one. An analysis of the available literature reveals that Surface level dimensions have received the most scholarly attention as they are determined quickly and have high degree of consistency by others. Various contextual factors have been reason for the degree of attention each of the dimensions has received. Colonization in the past and globalization has led to profuse studies on cultural as dimension of diversity. Preceding in the last decade gender has been explored by both researchers and practitioners across

the world due to change in the demographics and impulse of employers to utilize untapped talent. Studies on sexual orientation is triggered by social justice, legislative and business case requirements, only in few parts of the world such as Europe, Australia, parts of North America and South Africa. However each dimension has been identified as double –edged sword, with the claims of being advantageous as well as disadvantageous. There exists scope for future research to explore other dimensions of diversity at workplace. In the available literature it is difficult to find unanimity and differentiating perspectives from each other, as these are encountered among authors on each dimensions and calls for large scale research to arrive at a consensus.

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