

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a diverse organization makes good business sense for both for profit and not for profit companies. Creating a diverse workforce provides tremendous opportunities for organizations and individuals to tap into the ideas, creativity and potential contributions inherent in a diverse work force.

The composition of America's workforce is changing. According to the census Bureau, nonwhite will represent more than one-third of the U. S. population by the year 2010 and close to half of the U. S. population by the ear 2050. By the year 2005, the ethnic minority share of the workforce will reach 28 percent. It is also projected that the Hispanic-American population will be the largest minority group in the U. S. by the year 2010.

In order for companies to fully and aggressively compete in the marketplace, they will need to consider these statistics and work towards attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse workforce. This will be critical if they are to survive. They will also need to recognize that the market they cater to is becoming more diverse. Diverse groups are a growing percentage of the buying power in the United States. In order to maintain competitive advantage in the sector they serve, organizations will need to truly understand its customers, clients, members and employees and will need to create an organizational climate that is welcoming to all.

The Birth of the Diversity Movement

The "Diversity" Movement was born in 1987, when the Hudson Institute launched a study titled "Workforce 2000". The study projected demographic trends that would impact the workplace, as we knew it by the year 2000. One of the predictions made

was that there would be a marked growth in the number of women and minorities entering the workforce. In fact, the report suggested that women, minorities and immigrants would account for 80% of the net addition to the labor force.

The report succeeded in raising awareness about the need to better understand the many faces emerging in America. The field of diversity was born as a direct result of this study.

While Affirmative Action and Equal Employment movements have increased the opportunities for ethnically diverse individuals, the diversity movement has moved the focus to recognizing and capitalizing on total diversity. The differences in ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, age, household composition, disability, occupation, geography and other demographic factors make up this new diversity.

The Goal of Diversity

A good diversity initiative is a tool that helps organizations reach their business goals. When an organization states in their mission statement that they recognize the value of diversity, they are stating that they recognize that there are a variety of different individuals within the organization and that these individuals have different needs. The goal of diversity work is to address the challenges and opportunities that people bring to the workplace, not necessarily to increase diversity (although this can be a goal of diversity as well.)

Diversity vs. Affirmative Action

Most organizations believe that workplace diversity is about increasing racial, national, gender or class representation – in other words, recruiting and retaining more

people from traditionally underrepresented “identity groups.” This is the work of Affirmative Action. Thinking of diversity simply in terms of identity-group representation inhibits the effectiveness of diversity work. However, affirmative action, valuing differences and managing diversity work together towards meeting a common gain. Without the commitment of affirmative action to hiring and promoting diverse employees and having diverse staff, reaching the place where differences are valued would not be possible. In fact, diversity builds on the foundation laid by affirmative Action and EEO laws. Instead of pitting groups against one another, diversity works towards recognizing the uniqueness in everyone and valuing the contribution each person can make.

Some organizations still make the mistake of confusing Affirmative Action with Diversity planning. In reviewing the City of Tempe’s Diversity Initiative I found this to be true. They included statistics comparing the current ethnic composition of their work force to the ethnic demographics of the community. They also established hiring goals where the ethnic composition of the work force did not match the community. and called them “Diversity Goals”. These goals were established in much the same way Affirmative Action goals are set,

Many organizations also confuse cross-cultural differences with diversity. Cross-cultural differences training addresses topics such as language barriers and communicating across cultures. Diversity training programs address ethnic groups, cultural groups, political groups, etc., and focus on helping people to better express themselves and respond to situations.

Diversity Initiatives

A Diversity Initiative is a plan developed to help an organization work towards managing diversity. Managing diversity is different from both Affirmative action and valuing diversity because it focuses on the business case for diversity. It is seen as a strategic approach to business that contributes to organizational goals such as profits and productivity. Managing diversity moves beyond valuing diversity in that it is a way of doing business and is aligned with other organizational strategic plans.

Managing diversity also requires a change in the organizations culture. It is a business strategy that focuses on maximizing the productivity, creativity and commitment of the workforce while meeting the needs of a diverse consumer group. When implementing diversity initiatives, organizations need to be careful that diversity is not tainted by the negative perceptions that are often created by affirmative action. If the organization is not careful in implementing their diversity initiative, the results can be employee backlash, resistance and polarization.

The Components of a Successful Diversity Initiative

Before an organization determines where to begin developing an initiative, the must spend time determining the purpose of the initiative. They need to explore the reasons for beginning diversity work. They also need to identify critical strategic drivers and what and where are the challenges and opportunities. Once the cause for action has been clarified and the desired outcomes detailed, an organization can begin creating a plan.

In researching diversity initiatives, I determined that they all had very similar recommendations. They all had the common goal of improving the organization for

everyone and recommended that prior to determining where to begin, an organization should spend time determining the purpose of implementing a diversity initiative.

At a minimum, they should explore the reasons for beginning diversity work and they should identify the critical strategic drivers for their initiative. It is also important to determine the challenges and opportunities they will face. Once the cause for action has been clarified and the desired outcomes detailed, the plan creation can begin.

The following are the recommended steps for developing a basic diversity initiative:

- 1. Get executive commitment.** Getting commitment from the top is essential to forming a successful diversity initiative. Without the support, you will not be successful. Having commitment from the top sends a very clear message to the organizations senior management about the seriousness and business relevance of diversity. Also, top-down commitment reinforces the desired outcomes and helps to convey the message that cooperation, involvement and commitment of the part of senior management is expected.
- 2. Articulate the desired outcomes.** Be specific about how support and commitment are to be shown and from who it is expected.
- 3. Assess the climate, needs and issues at your organization.** Collect information from employees about their perception of diversity issues. It is also helpful to collect information to determine where your organization is on the diversity continuum.

- 4. Create and maintain open channels of communication with employees at the launch of the diversity initiative and throughout the process.** Communication is critical to the success of any diversity plan. It should occur at the beginning of the planning process and should continue throughout the entire process. Communicate back to senior management and staff any results and/or progress. This is essential in order to share successes and benefits and to continue to get support for your initiative.
- 5. Consider the formation of a diversity taskforce.** If you create a taskforce, ensure that it is composed of a vertical and horizontal cross-section of your organization. This team can help analyze assessment data and make recommendations to top management.
- 6. Develop a mechanism for dealing with systemic changes and procedural problems.** Obstacles and problems must be addressed in order for a diversity initiative to succeed. Work on implementing solution plans to any the organization may encounter. Consider using a diversity taskforce or the creation of special task force teams to work on recommending possible solutions.
- 7. Design relevant, interactive applicable training.** Effective training will increase awareness and understanding about diversity and will also develop concrete skills that employees can use to deal with workplace diversity, its implementations and its effects. Start with awareness training and advance to knowledge training and training that builds specific diversity skills.

8. **Evaluate and measure each component of your diversity initiative.**

Evaluate the results of your initiative and measure progress. Set measurable criteria and determine what you would like to accomplish and how you will gather the data. Also pre-and post assessment and measuring against baseline data is helpful.

9. **Ensure integration and accountability.** Lastly, you will need to integrate your diversity efforts into the culture of the organization and hold senior management accountable for pushing diversity down into the organization. This step will make diversity an integral part of the organization, its operations, systems and policies.

Communication Of Your Diversity Initiative

Communicating your plan to staff is a critical part of the diversity process. It can dispel myths and help avoid backlash and ensure success. Some of the critical aspects of effective initial communication about diversity include:

1. **Explain the business Case.** Employees will wonder why you are spending time, money and energy on diversity. Explain its relevance to the goals of the organization and how it affects the bottom line.
2. **Build on your organizations existing values and visions.** Integrate diversity into your core values and goals.
3. **Show staff what's in it for them.** For example, diversity will create more effective teams, lessen conflict on the job and will provide a greater understanding of the customers you serve.

4. **Spell out an inclusive definition of diversity.** Explain that diversity is far more than just race and gender and that it encompasses multiple dimensions of similarity and difference. This will help them see themselves as part of the diverse mix and will see it as a way to help others rather than themselves.
5. **Explain the process.** Let employees know how they are part of the process. Show how managing diversity is an ongoing process, rather than a one-time event and how it is part of how the organization works and not just a flavor of the month.
6. **Demonstrate Commitment.** Many employees will be somewhat skeptical about any change. Make sure your organization shows that it is serious about diversity and place a credible leader at the helm of this process.

Any communication needs to be concise and to the point and must also make the case for a diversity initiative. It should be in the language of your industry, your organization and your employees in order for it to work.

Where Should Diversity Be Housed?

Where the Diversity Initiative is housed in organizations depends upon the structure of the organization itself. Many larger companies have a sizeable diversity staff while smaller organizations tend to include their diversity initiative as part of another department. In smaller organizations, that department is human resources.

While many experts in diversity feel that diversity initiatives should be independent of human resources, there are some advantages to housing the diversity initiative in the Human Resources Dept. HR is experienced in managing change and developing and implementing diversity-related issues. HR is often seen as an advocate

of staff and as caring of employee concerns, resulting in a higher level of trust. HR is also best equipped at understanding and dealing with human relations issues and is skilled in training and facilitation. Also, as the HR profession becomes a more integral part of senior management, diversity can be better championed as an organization priority.

Some disadvantages of housing diversity initiatives in the HR Department include: HR is responsible for enforcing EEO and affirmative action regulations. As a result, employee could perceive diversity as a race and gender issue only; there may be limited support because of a perceived lack of credibility and competence in some organizations, and in some organizations, HR may not be able to access and obtain key executive buy-in.

An organization may also consider placing diversity in a department/position that reports directly to the organization CEO. The advantages include access, visibility and support, less obstacles to establishing credibility, less obstacles to developing diversity competencies throughout the organization, better positioned to enlist organization-wide support, better positioned to present and develop workplace diversity as a core business initiative and the success of the initiative is immediately and directly affected by a CEO's perceived level of support of the initiative.

Some disadvantages of having diversity report to the CEO include: because the initiative is immediately visible there is less of an opportunity to develop it before being evaluated, the success of an initiative is immediately and directly affected by a CEO's perceived level of support, there is less experience with facilitating change and implementing organization-wide initiatives, less experience with training and human

relations and lastly, diversity management may be seen by the CEO as a low priority issue.

Other possibilities for placing diversity include the Marketing Department, and Public Affairs Department. It could also be the shared responsibility of Human Resources and the Office of Diversity; the CEO and all direct reports; or the CEO, all direct reports and the Office of Diversity. When deciding where to place diversity, it is important to consider that the placement of a diversity initiative and the design of its reporting relationships send a strong message about the value of diversity to the organization.

Measuring Diversity

Measuring the success of diversity programs is essential for benchmarking growth and for developing future steps to take so that your organization's bottom line is positively impacted. The following is an example of an outline that you can use for measuring your organization's diversity effort.

1. **Collect baseline data.** Measure and gather data about current conditions. You can collect information from a number of sources.
 - You can collect existing organization data. Include affirmative action plans, EEO complaints and grievances, and turnovers and absenteeism statistics to give you a total picture. Existing employee satisfaction survey results can also shed light on factor relevant to diversity.
 - You can conduct a diversity survey. This can be done by surveying either a random sample or all employees. It is important that the survey tool you

use is tailored to your organization and will provide the information you need.

- You can develop focus groups. By getting employees together in small groups to discuss their perception of obstacles, issues and conditions you will be able to obtain pertinent information.

2. Determine Objectives. Once baseline data has been collected, you need to lay out clear objectives that are measurable. Some examples include:

- Reduce turnover of female employees by 25%
- Improve overall employee satisfaction by 10%
- Track employees to more closely match demographics of the total workforce.

3. Measurement. After you have implemented interventions, measure again, comparing your new findings to baseline data. Use the same process in the post-phase that you did in the pre-assessment.

For example, to measure the effect of your diversity awareness training, add one question to a regularly administered employee satisfaction survey.

Simply ask employees to indicate whether or not they attended diversity training and compare the survey results of those who had not participated in training. You can then compare level of satisfaction in general and determine whether or not training had a positive impact on employee performance.

Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

The last component of a successful diversity program is the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. Key recruitment strategies include

- **Focus on retention.** Create a climate that is welcoming and hospitable to those who are in some way different from existing groups in your organization. Unless this happens, costly turnovers will continue as new talent leaves.
- **Develop internal candidates for promotion.** Make sure you remove any overt barriers to promoting o internal candidates.
- **Build a reputation for being diversity-friendly.** Make sure your company is seen as one that offers real opportunities to diverse employees, where all employees are treated with respect and where line/senior management is composed of a mix of a people. This will attract diversity applicants to your organization.
- **Build and expand your informal network.** Recruitment efforts depend upon the quality of the relationships you cultivate with diverse individuals both inside the organization and outside in the community.

A proactive approach to recruitment will enable your organization to be more effective in achieving its goal of a productive and diverse workforce.