Chapter 8
Diversity and Organizational Change

Introduction

Effectively managing diversity requires that you be an effective manager of change. After all, diversity is not a program, "it is a process of systemic organizational change." When people think of diversity as a program, they might think that at some point they will be finished with it and can go on to something else. However, this is not the case. Generally speaking, the need to successfully manage diversity will always be a priority whenever you have people in the organization who are different in a variety of ways.

Like any other change initiative in the organization, to achieve results, your efforts to manage diversity in your workforce will require the basics of building a strategy, creating a tactical plan, taking ownership, being accountable, and implementing and measuring progress against the plan. It must also embody the principle of continuous improvement to seek new ways to create a high performing work environment using diversity.

Building a Change Strategy for Diversity Management

Developing a strategy and putting a plan in place are the first steps in any change effort. What separates an ordinary manager from a great manager of diversity is their ability not only

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to plan, but their ability to *execute* the plan, measure progress, make adjustments, and achieve results. Without these actions, even the best plans for change can fail.

To begin, it is critical that you create a personal action plan that focuses on the use of tools and techniques mentioned in this guidebook for diversity management.

Creating a Tactical Diversity Management Plan for Change

Once your diversity management strategy is in place, it is time to consider what is needed to create a set of tactical plans to put your diversity process into action. Initiating, changing, refocusing, or revitalizing your organization's commitment to create a diverse and inclusive environment starts with building a baseline—building a solid understanding of the organization's current level of effectiveness in mastering the basics that influence the organization's ability to lead and accelerate the diversity change process. This requires that you help the organization do the following:

❖ Analyze its communications strategy and messages

❖ Find out the state of the organization from the line perspective

❖ Create measures and key performance indicators that provide feedback proactively, not reactively

❖ Analyze and evaluate all supporting organizational processes and practices

❖ Search for "low hanging fruit" as well as set a plan for the long-term

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Analyze the Organization's Communications Strategy and Messages

Communicate, communicate, communicate. It is critical that the messages regarding diversity get out to the workforce. Therefore, it is vital to determine how effectively you are communicating. Take the time to find out. Like any kind of change effort, a shift to a more diverse, inclusive work environment requires the leadership team to communicate the key themes of diversity consistently and often if it is to become a reality. Messages of diversity must be reflected in all the dimensions and language channels, which include words, behavior, and action. People within the organization must link diversity to the critical operating needs of the organization.

This won't happen using a pile of slides in a PowerPoint presentation or a slick model or card that states the organization's commitment to diversity. You, as a leader, must put your own signature on key diversity themes in "one-on-one" conversations, large and small group presentations, and your being visibly present to demonstrate your support. You should craft three or four themes that represent the key diversity messages you want to convey to your staff and others. What would you want to say to others that represents your values and commitment to create a diverse and inclusive organization? Use Exercise 8-1 to compile your themes.

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Exercise 8-1. Key Diversity Themes I Support

Theme 1:

What makes Theme 1 important to me and/or the organization?

Messages I will deliver about this theme include:

Theme 2:

What makes Theme 2 important to me and/or the organization?

Messages I will deliver about this theme include:

Theme 3:

What makes Theme 3 important to me and/or the organization?

Messages I will deliver about this theme include:

Theme 4:

What makes Theme 4 important to me and/or the organization?

Messages I will deliver about this theme include:

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Take the time to schedule the implementation of your diversity communications plan and the delivery of your key diversity messages (e.g., at the next staff meeting, in a one-on-one conversation, or during the next town hall meeting with your department or the organization). Think about the leaders and speakers who have had the most influence on you. What did they do to capture your attention and make their message stand out in your mind? Think about the fact that your audience will be made up of a diverse group of people, so you must think of the most effective way to communicate so that they are receptive.

In addition, be authentic. Your staff has heard you talk about things before and has judged you by it. If you have not been supportive of diversity previously, let them know what things led you to your current position and what they can count on you for in the future. Remember, everyone has the capacity to change if they really want to. You do not have to talk about what you did *not* do in the past. The past, including the good and the challenging, helped you to get to the point where you are today. And that includes gaining new knowledge about diversity and learning from it. Your messages must be delivered convincingly, consistently, and often, and you must be visibly supportive to effect change.

Find Out the State of the Organization from the Line Perspective

Creating a diverse organization with equal access at all levels and an environment that respects, values, and engages the talents of all its people does not happen or maintain itself automatically. It requires an ongoing strategic focus with systems,

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processes, values, and people to support it. Like any other change process, it takes time, conviction, and personal involvement. As a change agent and leader, you must get personally involved to ask "What's happening in our organization that supports diversity? What's not happening? What should I be doing right now to influence action toward our diversity vision? Toward the messages I support?" By taking time to assess where you are in the process, you open yourself up for the broader opportunities that might be available. You must model the inclusion process by getting others at all levels involved and working together productively toward the diversity vision.

Create Measures and Key Performance Indicators that Provide Feedback Proactively, Not Reactively

Compliance with laws and governmental regulations is only a small portion of what diversity is about. Diversity encompasses much, much more. Effective diversity performance and change is driven by execution, not by strategy alone, and diversity measurement drives execution.

It is a known fact that the best leaders accomplish their strategy by having goals and excellent feedback mechanisms to know they are making progress. They make it a point to personally inspect and find out how things are going. They use tools such as surveys, focus groups, town hall meetings, consultants, and steering committees to stay informed of the diversity change management process. They conduct informal reviews and check for problems. They create diversity metrics that are linked to the organization's strategy so that they know if the workforce is being fully utilized.

By working proactively instead of reactively, effective leaders are able to address issues before they become major problems. People respond to what is measured and reviewed. It helps to keep the diversity change effort focused and promotes continuous improvement.

Analyze and Evaluate All Supporting Organizational Processes and Practices

An effective diversity manager in a change process will search for leverage points—they look for influence points in other processes that help integrate diversity and inclusion into the organization's mainstream. They assess options and opportunities to enhance current organizational processes, so they include diversity supportive language, processes, and methods. This search for processes covers the gamut from operational processes and performance planning to work-life, customer strategies, and supply-chain management. Subtle messages and more overt processes for diversity and inclusion are a key part of the fabric that covers the way an organization does business.

Search for "Low Hanging Fruit" as well as Set a Plan for the Long-Term

In addition to creating a long-term, strategic approach, it is also important to recognize the things that are going well in the organization. Often, during your informal review, you will find people or diverse work teams doing outstanding work. Or, you may find opportunities for integrating diversity into the day-to-day process with little effort. Make it a point to seize these opportunities and recognize those who are making diversity happen in the organization.

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In addition, spend some time consciously looking for areas that can be improved. Watch out for situations where employees might be receiving poor or mixed messages about the organization's commitment to diversity. Be sure to let employees know about your point of view and the key messages that are a part of your personal commitment. Leadership teams will be viewed as suspect if they talk favorably in public about diversity and building an inclusive work environment, yet make few efforts to be inclusive in their own interactions with people outside their inner circle. Here are a couple of contradictory diversity management practices to watch out for:

✤ Staff who talk about being friendly and welcoming to everyone, yet they are unapproachable and grumpy

✤ Managers who repeatedly cancel appointments, are late, or take calls when dealing with people who are different from themselves, yet this does not happen with their "inner circle" group

✤ Managers who consistently schedule meetings with weekend travel

✤ Managers espousing the value of diversity of thought and style, but who are quick to stamp out any new idea

What examples come to mind for you?

It is critical to remember that your strategies, measures, and messages are the basic fundamentals of change. It is up to you to plan your diversity change work and then work your plan!

References

Hubbard, E. E. (2002). *Techniques for managing a diverse workforce.* Petaluma, CA: Global Insights Publishing.