Elements Of Successful Organizational Diversity Management Essay, Research Paper

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Organizational Diversity Management

Why is organizational diversity important? Historically, diversity in the workplace has been recognized as an employment equity issue. Now, however, diversity in the workplace is being recognized as a benefit that will contribute to an organization’s bottom line. Increased employee and customer satisfaction end up as increased productivity, all of which are measurable outcomes (Goff, 1998). Diversity goes beyond employment equity to nurturing an environment that values the differences and maximizes the potential of all employees, one that stimulates employee creativity and innovativeness (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (U.S. MSPB), 1993). To create an organizational culture that supports workforce diversity involves several important elements. These elements include a needs analysis, administrative and management support and commitment, education and training, culture and management systems changes and continuous follow-up and evaluation.

Needs Analysis

In many of my resources, a needs analysis was the second crucial element after senior management support and commitment. I feel a needs analysis should be prepared first to provide information to senior management in sequestering their support as well as to adequately determine workforce and organizational needs for creating a diverse workplace. First, find out what employees are concerned about. Most often used for this are focus groups and surveys. The needs and expectations of a diverse workforce can vary by organizational and functional levels, location, ethnicity, and gender (Baytos and Delatte, 1993). Second, determine the needs of the organization. By asking certain questions, an organization can determine its needs based on its culture and resources (U.S. MSPB, 1993). Does the organization have trouble retaining employees who would add to its diversity? In an organization with diversity, which, if any, areas of the workforce are being treated inappropriately? Has the organization impressed upon its leaders and managers the benefits that come from managing diversity appropriately? By using a survey that focuses on these questions you can ascertain where administration and management feel the organization presently is regarding diversity.

Administrative and Management Commitment and Support

Administrative and management support is critical for diversity change efforts. An important role for senior management is to provide leadership through development of a vision and goals for a diverse workplace (Lapid-Bogda, 1992). To gain support from administration you need to directly link diversity to the business. Be specific as to where the diversity issues lie. Are they employee or customer issues? Or both? Provide data regarding the diversity opportunities in the marketplace, workforce and organization (Prism International, 2000). Benchmarking best practices related to diversity from other organizations, demographic data, briefings regarding complaints, potential lawsuits, and hiring and retention problems are all relevant sources of data.

In general, the organizations experiencing the greatest success with diversity training are more likely to view diversity as a business issue rather than a social issue (Profiting from others’, 1994). Link diversity to other organizational initiatives, such as quality management or career development (Lapid-Bogda, 1992). Discuss both your initial assessment of what will be required for implementation and institutionalization of diversity management and the known elements in the organization that will promote and/or hinder the successful achievement of diversity management (Prism International, 2000). Finally, administrative support and commitment is essential also for the means to provide the programs and resources necessary for diversity education and training. You’ll never survive the first round of budget cuts without the support of administration.

Education and Training

Organizations that successfully manage diversity distinguish between the differences of education and training. Education is a building of awareness and creating a base of general understanding. At the administrative and management levels, educational efforts can spawn interest and an awareness of need, which can then extend the change process throughout the organization (Baytos and Delatte, 1993). Education provides a setting to define issues, develop consistent language and to discuss the nature and source of biases that hinder our ability to perceive others clearly.

Training involves activities designed to build usable skills. Training targets in on specific issues to develop the skills necessary to effectively and sensitively deal with an issue. For example, training might teach managers how to conduct performance appraisals with employees from a different culture. By using the information gathered during the needs analysis, an organization can target in on the specific diversity issues they need to address with training.

What has worked well for many organizations is to hire outside trainers for a short period of time to “train the trainer” and assist with the initial training workshops. Outside trainers tend to be more objective and are more likely to receive respect from employees, which is valuable in the initial diversity training effort. Before an organization hires an outside trainer, it should thoroughly review the trainer’s credentials. Ask for references, and follow up on them. It’s also wise to ask candidates to prepare a proposal that outlines how they will link their training to the

organizational culture and business strategy. The advantage of internal trainers is that they understand the organization’s culture and can manage the training process (Caudron, 1993). Having training programs conducted by a diverse group of trainers produces a more relevant, creative product and one that demonstrates the organization’s value of diversity (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 2000).

Mandatory training across all levels sends a convincing message about the organization’s commitment to diversity and increases the likelihood that what lower-level employees learn will be role-modeled and reinforced by their managers. Findings clearly indicate that it is the attendance of managers, not employees, that makes the most positive impact on training outcomes (Profiting from others’, 1994).

If the training is not relevant to the needs of the workforce, more harm than good may occur. For example, an organization that had a large gay and lesbian population decided to conduct diversity training without learning about the concerns and expectations of the employees. Their training program focused on racial issues (which weren’t a problem at this company) and ignored

homophobia (which was a problem). Gay employees left the training feeling as if management didn’t consider their issues to be important (Caudron, 1993).

Diversity training needs to be effective. There is a substantial foundation of knowledge and expertise associated with understanding the effects of diversity in organizations. The trainer needs to be proficient in the subject matter and possess good facilitation skills in order to provide high quality training (Cox, 1994). Some examples of ineffective training include training that attempts to fix the victim, by trying to get these individuals to conform to the organization’s culture, training that tries to force politically correct language onto workshop participants and

training that focuses on confronting stereotypes without giving importance to developing the skills needed to bring awareness of these stereotypes back to the workplace. Raising awareness is important, but you have to tell employees how to apply that awareness to their jobs (Caudron,

1993). Needless to say, education and training are absolutely necessary, but will be ineffective if an organization does not change its systems (Johnson, 1992).

Culture and Management Systems Changes

Diversity needs to be a way of life, not just an organizational buzzword. Bond (1998), states

that articulated values and team structures are important but not sufficient to support diversity in an organization. This element should include an assessment of the organizational culture and human resource management systems of the organization. Effective organizational diversity management needs to go beyond programs, processes and activities to develop a culture that recognizes and rewards those who value, promote and facilitate workplace diversity (Wong, 1999). The formation of a diversity team, consisting of predominantly non-management members from all areas of the organization with the leader of this group a person trained in diversity, is crucial. Management has to then create avenues that allow this group to make the changes they identify as necessary (Johnson, 1992).

An organization should take stock of all training and development provided and then assess diversity’s link to the content and process of the training. Consider how diversity concepts such as cultural differences, stereotypes, and assumptions relate to the training’s topic; also, think about how differences in background, styles and culture influence participant receptivity and comfort. Next, adapt both content and process to suit the needs of a wide variety of employees working in a diverse environment (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 2000).

Policies and practices need to be systematically reviewed to see how they can incorporate diverse needs and preferences and then, if necessary, changed to move diversity beyond the personal awareness level and integrate it into the company culture (Johnson, 1992).

Managers need to know what their role is in supporting diversity. Many organizations provide continuous education and training regarding diversity principles and diversity skill development for all managers. These principles and skills include recruitment and retention, diversity conflict resolution, diversity performance coaching, and career development. Most importantly, though, is that management must “walk the talk”. Managers and supervisors must transform their attitudes into actual behavioral changes, and the organization must promote and accommodate new attitudes and behavior (Morris, Romero and Tan, 1996).

Follow-up and Evaluation

Many of the successful organizations practice some type of long-term follow-up and monitoring to maintain the positive effects of training efforts. These efforts include: establishing a committee and/or developing a newsletter to track progress, highlight various cultures, etc.; periodically administering a survey to gauge results; and meeting regularly with managers and administrators to review these efforts (Jordan, 1999). Other organizations have established employee development and mentoring programs, to help a broader range of employees move up in the organization (Caudron, 1993).

By evaluation I am referring to measuring the outcomes of diversity efforts and change. Results can be measured through increased employee retention, improved accountability and increased alignment with the organization’s mission (Black and Prudente, 1998). Diversity often has both tangible and intangible benefits (such as “increased job satisfaction” or “reduced conflict”) and an attempt to quantify these benefits should be made (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 2000). As Albert Einstein said, “Not everything that can be measured counts and not everything that counts can be measured.” Finally, continuously review your initiative by asking those within your organization: Is this working? If it is, find out what’s working and keep doing it. If it’s not, reevaluate what you’re doing and why you’re doing it.

Conclusion

Building a truly effective diversity program requires a comprehensive, long-term commitment from administration, human resources, managers and employees. Creating an organizational culture that supports workforce diversity involves several crucial elements. The needs and expectations of both the workforce and the organization must be ascertained. These needs and expectations are important to secure administration and management support as well as to ensure that the training will have relevance. Continuous follow-up of the training and initiatives is important to reinforce what has been learned as well as to demonstrate commitment and to “keep the fires burning”. Measuring the tangible and intangible outcomes of diversity management keeps the process flowing and links the initiative to the business strategy. More than simply a training program, diversity must be woven into the fabric of the organization. By learning from other organizations successes, you can plan your course of action and help improve the process of managing diversity in your organization.

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Included in report.