Managing Diversity

The cultural diversity puzzle suggests that both similarity and differences in cultures can both help and hinder the success of an organization. Similar cultural backgrounds lead to a shared connection and collaboration is less pragmatic, yet differences in cultures lead to a higher inclusive environment, better decision-making, and higher competitive advantages (Vangen, 2014). However, all of these similarities and differences need to be managed.

**Management of Diversity**

The first step to effectively manage workplace diversity would be to understand employee perspectives. Managers having an understanding of where employees are coming from, could help managers make future decisions about the employees, anticipate behaviors and reactions to changes, and eliminate or be proactive about problems.

In a recent example, Whole Foods store, came under fire about their uniform code of communication during working hours after two employees were dismissed after complaining about not being allowed to speak their native language. If managers had a better understanding of the employee perspective a concessions could have been made for their employees (Grivastava, 2015).

Some actions management can take into account to better understand employee perspectives and diversity in organizations would be to determine what diversity means to for the organization. This could be one of three areas:

1. A specific set of diverse skill sets- what is the organization looking for in it diversity initiatives of their workforce
2. Know the Cultural diverse backgrounds of the workforce- management needs to be sensitive when making decisions that impact diverse cultures but management must be aware of what these cultural backgrounds are of their employees.
3. Combination of the two- it might not be enough to just review the skill sets or be aware of the cultural backgrounds but a combination of the two

**Tools for Managing Diversity**

Once these areas are determined, managers can then determine what tools should be used to measure the selected diversity components in the organization. There are two basic types of measurements; Quantitative using data to review headcounts, percentages, rates, ratios, etc. of the workforce and Qualitative which are used to evaluate quality efforts of diversity plans.

**Diversity Metrics**

Whether you are using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods to review diversity in your organization, it is important to ask specific questions in order to determine what to capture or review. It is important to note that the organization may not have a benchmark for diversity initiatives and therefore will need to either establish one or use an industry standard to set one. Some examples of focus areas are listed below:

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| **Focus Area** | **Measuring** |
| Transaction Metrics | Monitor groups being retained, advanced, etc. at expected rates relative to benchmark rates |
| Recruitment Metrics | Monitor groups of applicant pools to benchmark  |
| Representation Metrics | Monitor groups with internal or external benchmark  |
| Staffing placement Metrics | Monitor groups hired or placed against benchmark  |
| Training Metrics | Review diversity-related training programs for participation rates and demographics of talent pipeline against benchmark  |
| Workplace Climate Metrics | Review trend or comparison analysis of company areas to improve companywide benchmarks |

Best Practices for Diversity

**Best Practices**

As organizations strive to gain a competitive advantage, organizations’ will have increased demands to hire a diverse workforce. Companies can roll out diversity initiatives to increase female executives, create diverse task forces, or the creation of diversity policies. However, there are ways to establish standards or best practices with diversity initiatives.

**Set Specific Goals**

Once leadership has determined diversity planning, standards specific goals can be created to ensure success of these diversity strategies. If for example, you are reviewing your metrics on gender groups of your executive leadership teams against an internal and/or external benchmark; goals could be set to increase these standards to meet the requirement. Human resources management could be directed at this time to actively use recruitment practices towards the specific target group.

**Make Policies and Expectations Clear**

As leadership sets specific goals about diversity standards, these need to be clear and well-defined in order to eliminate confusion or surprises from different cultures. Having these well-defined policies for training, communication, and conflict resolution aid with employee reference. For example, if English is not the first language of an employee, communication practices in a team-based environment could be especially challenging. Having a diversity policy specifically for communication practices can help with communication in a diverse team environment (Grivastava, 2015).

**Diversity Training**

Employees must be trained in the all diversity policies and expectations so they understand how they are impacted and how diversity practices in the workplace are influenced. Employees should be trained at three major points. First, in the on-boarding process of new employees. All new employees should review policy standards and expectations of diversity standards along with their new hiring policy reviews. Second, diversity training should be an annual compliance standard set by the organization as a continual reminder of diversity initiatives and practices. Having workshops with role-playing opportunities for employees to practice diverse issues or awareness are most popular. Lastly, diversity training should be expected as part of an employee’s continual education. For example, Coca-Cola has continued diversity training at different levels so that employees can sign up for and receive credit for taking part in their personal ongoing development with the organization (Grivastava, 2015). These credits are viewed as additional diversity training and not mandatory for employees.

**Best Practices Specifically for Management**

The following areas are specifically tied to management functions or activities that can be done in one’s own scope of management.

* *Adaptive Leadership Styles*- the ability to adapt to an employees are of comfort is not a new management technique. However, in the scope of diversity knowing that high power distance cultural groups like China, Japan, or India have high regards for authority could adapt their leadership style to be clear and direct.
* *Conflict Management*- "Social categorization" can result from biases of diverse groups working together. Diverse employees may be unwilling to work together based on these biases, which can lead to conflicts. Managers must show support and commitment for diversity and understand that some conflict in groups is a good thing to foster creativity. However, management must be ready to deal with conflicts when results give way to dysfunctional groups and the well-being of the organization.
* *Diversity Committees*- a formation of diversity committees in departments is a good way to foster positive communication between groups before conflicts arise. Committees can work towards proactive events that foster inclusion, communication, and awareness of diverse groups.
* *Creating a Diversity Plan*- managers can create a diversity plan for their departments and employees. The diversity plan focuses on three key strategies: 1) developing employees to their maximum potential, 2) create an inclusive work environment, 3) work towards being an employer of choice.

Manager’s Impact on Diversity

Feedback is a natural part of the control function of management. Managers are trained in giving and receiving feedback but what or how do you know to give feedback to employees of different cultural backgrounds?

**Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings**

First we have to review cross-cultural misunderstandings that can arise from common language or different communication styles that aid in friction among employees. Organizations that effectively manage not just what the message or feedback is, but how the message or feedback is delivered admit to successful business practices. For example, some individuals are more comfortable with direct language and task directed examples when receiving feedback from management. Many other cultures prefer communication to be less direct and more relationship oriented. Understanding and tailoring these two different communication styles to the employees during feedback gives managers less of a chance to have misunderstandings based on cultural differences.

**What You Say**

Managers additionally must monitor what specific words are used when delivering feedback. For example, employees that prefer direct communication styles were commonly responsive to bold or blunt words or terms such as "absolutely", "concrete", or "totally."

Less direct communicators would prefer a softer approach, especially when giving critical feedback. Managers would express feedback with terms such as "maybe", "a bit", or "sort of" in order to meet the employees comfort level.

**Know Your Audience**

The ultimate goal of managers is to deliver the effective feedback to employees and in some cases, changing the communication style to help ensure the effectiveness of the delivery. Choosing the right communication method comes down to knowing and understanding your audience needs, and adapting for communication success.

**Feedback Tools**

There are many assessment tools a manager will use in order to deliver feedback to employees. 360-feedback assessments are common in Western cultures and are used to collect information about your team. The 360-feedback assessment method provides employees the opportunity to receive performance feedback from their supervisor, peers, staff members, coworkers, and customers anonymously. However, these common tools might not work in all cultures and may need to be adapted or replaced for some cultural backgrounds. For example the 360-feedback assessment does not account for employee recourse or further understanding of the results because the feedback results are anonymous.

**Delivery Feedback**

While tools like the 360 method or others can be modified to address concerns, some simple points when delivery feedback to employees can be followed below no matter the cultural background.

1. **Simply Ask:** Asking the employee if they are ready and open to receive feedback prepares the employee for what is coming or when would be a good time for them.
2. **Be Specific:** Once the employee is open for feedback, be specific in your details to them. For example, if a specific behavior or attitude was observed, discuss the example clearly with the employee.
3. **Impact of Employee Behavior:** once you have specifically called out the example of the behavior, discuss the impact on the team, management, customers, etc.
4. **Discuss Next Steps:** Regardless of the behavior or attitude being positive or negative, asking open-ended questions encourages the employee to take corrective action. The manager can make suggestions for change in the case of negative behaviors or encouragement in the case of positive behaviors.

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