

DIVERSITY NEWS

October 2007

Yvonne: In previous editions of Diversity News, we've talked about various aspects of diversity management. For example, best practices in diversity management, WORST practices in diversity management...

Thomas: That is, why diversity initiatives FAIL...

Yvonne: ... and how diversity management fits into the larger picture of organizational—and employee—performance management. We've also talked about how diversity management fits into the larger picture of management best practices.

Thomas: What we have NOT done—at least, not yet—is provide a method of tying together the various ASPECTS of diversity management into a comprehensive, start-to-finish, long-term, lasting, organizational change initiative. But that's about to change.

Yvonne: In THIS edition of Diversity News, we'll take a look at a “nuts and bolts” guide to diversity management: Tina Rasmussen's “Diversity Mosaic: The Complete Resource for Establishing a Successful Diversity Initiative.”

Yvonne: In her book, Dr. Rasmussen describes six steps involved in establishing a successful diversity and inclusion initiative:

In step 1, senior leaders commit to undertaking long-term action for increasing diversity and inclusion.

In step 2, the diversity team gathers information to discover apparent—as well as underlying—issues. Findings establish quantitative and qualitative baselines for measuring future progress.

In step 3, senior leaders create a vision, with goals and measures of success. The diversity team then develops a plan (and a budget) to accomplish those goals.

In step 4, the diversity team designs improvement processes that will achieve goals according to the plan.

In step 5, leaders and the diversity team mobilize people's commitment to implement improvements, and make adjustments as needed.

In step 6, the diversity team measures progress on goals against baseline measures. Senior leaders reward successes and use data on improvement areas to create a new plan.

Dr. Rasmussen estimates that the time to complete the six steps will range between 15 and 34 months. But that's not the end of the process.

The 6-step cycle may be repeated several times over a period of five to ten years in order to ensure that cultural competence and inclusion become integral parts of the organization.

Thomas: As Dr. Rasmussen describes it, the first step in a successful diversity initiative is for senior leaders to commit to undertaking long-term action to improve their organization's inclusiveness and level of cultural competence.

Dr. Rasmussen divides this step into four essential parts:

First, clarify the business case for diversity—that is, the elements of the organization's mission and business goals that make diversity an urgent issue.

According to Dr. Rasmussen, the business case for diversity must be specific and relevant to the organization's existing priorities.

Second, define key roles. That is, clarify who will do what.

Being clear about roles will help enlist people as diversity champions and will prevent people from stepping on each other's toes.

Third, create a diversity initiative charter.

The charter will clarify expectations of the diversity team and serve as a guiding document for the team's efforts.

It also explains the team's importance to the organization.

And fourth, select and launch the diversity team.

Dr. Rasmussen points out that, although many organizations use the word "council" for their diversity team, she believes the word "team" more accurately embodies the "hands-on" work of the group.

According to Dr. Rasmussen, the diversity team should represent a cross-section of the organization's stakeholders.

For example, members should come from a variety of levels, functions, programs, and locations within the organization.

In addition, team members should represent a variety of diversity dimensions: such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, education level, etc.

And membership should be voluntary, since commitment and time availability are crucial for success.

People with a passion for the work are needed to make the team successful.

Yvonne: After the senior leaders are clear about WHY they want to undertake a diversity initiative, and after the diversity TEAM has been launched, the NEXT step is to assess the current situation. That is, once you know WHY you want to change the organizational culture, you need to answer the question, “Where are we right now?”

Dr. Rasmussen divides THIS step into four essential parts:

First, decide WHAT you want to measure. In the example she provides for a “cultural competence scorecard,” Dr. Rasmussen includes three types of measures:

Measures of workplace culture (that is, how inclusive your internal environment is),

Measures of marketplace reputation (that is, how inclusive do people outside the organization PERCEIVE you to be?),

And measures of workforce representation (that is, how well does the organization’s workforce reflect the populations or communities it serves?).

After deciding what to MEASURE, assessment tools and methods must be developed or customized.

In her book, Dr. Rasmussen provides TWO assessment tools, both in the form of survey questionnaires.

One questionnaire addresses the workplace climate (in terms of recruitment, retention, communication, leadership, and interpersonal relations).

The other questionnaire addresses customer and community perspectives on various aspects of the organization.

After customizing the assessment tools and methods to be used, the senior leaders communicate the process and gather the data.

That is, BEFORE asking people for information, the leaders let people know WHAT information will be collected, WHY it will be collected, and HOW it will be used.

Finally, after collecting the data, the results are compiled into a usable format.

To build trust and credibility, Dr. Rasmussen recommends sharing the results with the people who were interviewed.

Not only will that demonstrate respect and trust of the participants, it will also provide them with an opportunity to validate (or challenge) the leaders' interpretations of the results.

Thomas: After answering the question, "Where are we right now?" the next question is, "Where do we want to go?"

In the process of establishing a successful diversity and inclusion initiative, Dr. Rasmussen divides THIS step also into four parts:

After the current situation has been assessed, senior leaders create a vision of the organization's desired future—with respect to diversity and inclusion.

The vision should focus on the most motivating elements of the business case for diversity, combined with areas identified in the assessment as strengths or opportunities for improvement.

With that vision in mind, the senior leaders then set specific goals for what they want to accomplish within a specific period of time.

The goals should contain specific measures of success, including when progress will be measured, and qualitative and quantitative targets for improvement.

Given those goals, the diversity team then develops an action plan for how and when to accomplish the goals and measure progress toward attaining the vision.

The diversity team also determines the budget required to implement the plan.

When everyone is satisfied with the vision, the goals, and the action plan, these are shared with the entire organization.

The "kick-off" event should communicate a sense of urgency and inclusiveness in order to launch the initiative appropriately.

Yvonne: The next step requires the most intensive time commitment in the process of establishing a successful diversity and inclusion initiative.

Dr. Rasmussen divides THIS step, designing improvement processes, into three parts:

First, customize or develop the improvement processes identified in the action plan.

According to Dr. Rasmussen, five of the most common processes that may need attention are communication, recruitment, retention, diversity awareness and skills development, and leadership development.

Throughout the development phase, solicit feedback from others and make adjustments as necessary to ensure that the end products will be well received by the majority of people who will be using them.

Finally, produce—or buy—the final materials needed in the improvement process.

Diversity team members work with graphic artists and other specialists to create the final materials needed in the improvement process.

Some examples include binders, brochures, books, posters, videos, Web site information, and other items or instructional materials.

Dr. Rasmussen includes examples of materials that can be used to address the improvement of the most common processes needing attention.

Examples of processes for improving COMMUNICATION include having meetings, speeches, or videos in which senior leaders demonstrate their commitment to the success of the diversity initiative.

Other vehicles for improving communication include INTERNAL written communication (for example, memos, announcements, invitations, and newsletters) and EXTERNAL written communication, in the form of press releases and brochures.

Diversity events and celebrations also help educate people about different dimensions of diversity.

Examples of processes for improving RECRUITMENT include

- Diversity friendly benefits (like flextime, telecommuting, childcare, eldercare, and domestic partner benefits).
- Job descriptions that accurately reflect the real work (including job requirements and expected deliverables).
- Networking with professional associations, community organizations, and colleges and universities.
- Performance-based interviewing, focusing on candidate's ability to fulfill the requirements of the job.
- Soliciting feedback on recruiting practices from job candidates.
- And recruitment training for people involved in the process.

Examples of processes for improving RETENTION include:

- Formal or informal orientation for new employees.
- Effective performance development practices.
- Supportive practices, like employee resource groups and policies encouraging work/life balance.
- And teamwork, management, and leadership practices and policies establishing what behaviors are (and are not) acceptable.

Examples of processes for improving diversity awareness and skills development include self-assessment and 360-degree assessment, as well as diversity training.

Examples of processes for improving leadership development also include self-assessment and 360-degree assessment, as well as leadership training.

Thomas: Once the processes for improvement have been designed, it's time to put those processes into practice.

Dr. Rasmussen divides the implementation phase into three parts:

First, senior leaders and the diversity team determine methods to mobilize commitment.

According to Dr. Rasmussen, effecting true organizational change requires a “critical mass” of support from at least 25 percent of the people who will be affected by the change.

Involving people in the creation and implementation of various components of the diversity initiative will help create a sense of ownership.

Next, the diversity team prepares the implementation plan, based on the specific improvements desired.

Once approved by senior leaders, the implementation plan is shared with others who will be part of the plan's implementation.

Finally, implement the plan.

As implementation progresses, adjustments inevitably need to be made, and people should be encouraged to continue improving and enhancing the work already done.

Obtaining feedback early on—from the wider population of the organization—enables leaders and the diversity team to make course corrections along the way, rather than waiting an entire year or more to find out that something isn't working.

Yvonne: As Dr. Rasmussen describes it, the final step in a successful diversity initiative has three parts:

First, determine what progress has been made. The diversity team uses cultural competence scorecard measures and the original assessment tools to reassess the organization's level of inclusiveness, and to determine progress toward the vision and the goals.

Then, senior leaders review the results and determine how to reward people's hard work and achieved successes.

After that, senior leaders and the diversity team communicate the results to the wider organization population, emphasizing reasons for celebration, and acknowledging the continuous nature of the process.

After completing this step, senior leaders may want to establish new goals based on the findings of the reassessment. For nearly all organizations, according to Dr. Rasmussen, diversity initiatives cycle through the six steps several times, over a period of five to ten years, until diversity and inclusion become fully integrated into the organization's culture.

Yvonne: We'll be talking more about organizational culture and cultural change in future editions of Diversity News, but that's all we have time for in THIS month's edition. We certainly appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

Thomas: Until then, for more frequent updates of diversity news, sign up for our free weekly e-mail news service: NewsLink. Just send an e-mail message to the address shown below, with the words SUBSCRIBE NEWS in the subject line.

Yvonne: And check out our bimonthly newsletter, Diversity@Work, available as a download on our Web site or by e-mail from our office. Also on our Web site, you can find previous editions of Diversity News.

Thomas: If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at dmeeo@va.gov with the words DIVERSITY NEWS in the subject line. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Yvonne: Until next time...

Both: Have a great month!