

## DIVERSITY NEWS

July 2008

**Yvonne:** The world is changing...

**Thomas:** You can say that again!

**Yvonne:** The world is changing. And as a result of some of those changes, the work of diversity management is evolving, as well.

For example, as more and more employees at all levels find themselves working with people whom they may perceive as “different” in some significant way, the development of cultural competence and sensitivity becomes increasingly important.

**Thomas:** And it’s not just cultural differences that affect our ability to “work well with others.” Generational differences, for example, between baby boomers and younger employees, can sometimes get in the way of productivity.

**Yvonne:** Employee expectations and legal requirements are also changing, and those changes can impact the work of diversity professionals.

In this edition of Diversity News, we’ll take a look at some of the competencies required of diversity professionals in order to function successfully in this changing environment.

**Yvonne:** The Conference Board is the world's preeminent business membership and research organization.

Best known for the Consumer Confidence Index and the Leading Economic Indicators, The Conference Board has, for over 90 years, equipped the world's leading corporations with practical knowledge, through issues-oriented research and senior executive peer-to-peer meetings.

In 2001, The Conference Board published a report entitled, “The Diversity Executive: Tasks, Competencies, and Strategies for Effective Leadership.”

In a previous edition of Diversity News, we looked at what that report had to say about diversity leaders’ key responsibilities and the competencies required to carry out those responsibilities.

But what about the required competencies of other people involved in diversity and inclusion initiatives? Although they may not be leaders, they are involved in the work of diversity and inclusion. So, what should we expect of them?

In 2008, The Conference Board published a new report on diversity competencies, “Creating a Competency Model for Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners.”

In that report, The Conference Board describes a competency model consisting of seven categories:

Change management.

Diversity, inclusion, and global perspective.

Business acumen.

Strategic external relations.

Integrity.

Visionary and strategic leadership.

And HR disciplines.

**Thomas:** The primary focus of diversity management is on creating an environment in which all employees—all employees—can contribute to the maximum extent possible to their organization's success.

Such an environment must be flexible and inclusive.

For organizations that do not already possess such an environment, diversity management requires a cultural change.

As The Conference Board points out in its report, change management is a critical success factor for every diversity and inclusion practitioner.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners must be able to shepherd the organizational change process—through facilitation, clear communication, and appropriate, effective interventions.

Within the category of “change management,” The Conference Board identifies three competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

“Organization Development” refers to understanding and facilitating the change process, including gaining leadership involvement and employee ownership.

“Corporate Communications” refers to employing multiple communication media, keeping what is best for the business at the forefront, elaborating on the benefits of diversity and inclusion, tracking progress, and addressing obstacles and challenges.

“Critical Interventions” refers to offering useful and timely interventions when progress is impeded due to a diversity-related issue.

**Yvonne:** According to The Conference Board's report, globalization has probably done more to increase organizations' need for diversity and inclusion practitioners' expertise than any other single trend.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners must be cultural interpreters, global marketers, and mediators.

They must recognize and understand cultural norms and the subtle dynamics of cultural tensions or conflicts.

And they must be able to negotiate and facilitate others through these challenges.

Also, diversity and inclusion practitioners are role models. Through their behavior, they must demonstrate inclusion and cultural competence.

Within the category of "Diversity, Inclusion, and Global Perspective," The Conference Board identifies half a dozen competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

"Cultural Competence" refers to understanding multiple cultural frameworks and the dynamics of cross-cultural conflicts. It also involves demonstrating an ability to adapt when faced with various dimensions of culture.

"Negotiation and Facilitation" refers to negotiating and facilitating through cultural differences, conflicts, tensions, or misunderstandings.

"Continuous Learning" refers to recognizing and addressing one's own biases and cultural preferences, seeking and utilizing feedback from diverse sources, and committing to continuous learning.

"Complex Group Dynamics" refers to understanding and effectively managing group dynamics and ambiguity.

"Judgment" refers to being able to discern when to inquire, advocate, or resolve more decisively.

And "Subject Matter Expertise" refers to knowing and applying best practices in diversity and inclusion.

This includes understanding subtle and complex diversity and inclusion issues as they relate to marginalized groups.

And being a role model for inclusive and culturally competent behavior.

**Thomas:** As The Conference Board points out in its report, an effective diversity and inclusion practitioner is required to be a full business partner.

Within the category of “Business Acumen” The Conference Board identifies three competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

“External Market Knowledge” refers to understanding global and local trends, and how those trends affect the organization, its customers, its suppliers, and its other stakeholders.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners must gather and use business information in the same manner as any other business person.

They must also understand their organization’s diverse customers and the socio-political environments in which their organization operates.

“Holistic Business Knowledge” refers to understanding an organization’s core business strategies, and the impact of financial, economic, and market drivers on bottom line results.

It also refers to using information from multiple disciplines and sources to offer integrated ideas and solutions on issues important to the organization.

“Diversity and Inclusion Return on Investment” refers to determining and communicating how diversity and inclusion contribute to the organization’s core business strategies and results.

It also refers to creating insights into how diversity and inclusion contribute to human resource strategies.

And it involves designing and developing metrics that exhibit diversity and inclusion’s return on investment.

**Yvonne:** As The Conference Board points out, diversity and inclusion practitioners are no longer focused solely on internal employee issues.

Increasingly, diversity and inclusion practitioners are responsible for contributing to external relationships—from tapping emerging markets, to managing positive media and community relations.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners are also now involved in organizations’ philanthropic efforts. They are also responsible for SUPPLIER diversity, and they contribute their expertise to marketing campaigns. And they are key players in the creation and enhancement of their organizations’ reputation.

Within the category of “Strategic External Relations,” The Conference Board identifies four competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

“Corporate Social Responsibility” refers to being well-informed about external pressure points, effectively anticipating and managing stakeholders, recognizing and addressing human rights issues, and influencing media and markets through communication and community outreach.

“Strategic Alliances” refers to identifying and leveraging relationships with key external organizations and leaders in order to enhance business results.

“Diversity Markets and Supplier Diversity” refers to identifying and leveraging relationships with key external suppliers, vendors, and customers in order to enhance the supply chain and increase market share and loyalty.

“Reputation Management” refers to positively influencing media and marketplace, forging strategic partnerships with internal constituencies, and supporting communities in which the organization operates.

**Thomas:** As The Conference Board points out in its report, it takes a special kind of person to succeed as a diversity and inclusion practitioner.

The diversity and inclusion practitioner must be ethical, resilient, influential, empathic, and a skilled communicator.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners use these skills to gain credibility and stature, build relationships, and garner support.

Within the category of “Integrity,” The Conference Board identifies five competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

“Ethics” refers to acting ethically and with integrity, behaving in a way that leads others to trust you, speaking with candor and tact, and acting as a voice for perspectives that are not otherwise represented.

“Resilience” refers to pursuing goals with drive and energy, not giving up before finishing (especially in the face of resistance).

It also means maintaining a positive and constructive outlook.

“Influence” refers to negotiating and persuading effectively at all levels of the organization, listening and adapting approaches to fit the audience, and managing and mediating conflict effectively.

“Empathy” refers to understanding the point of view and emotions of others, in the context of their cultures, and acknowledging others’ perspectives.

“Communication” refers to understanding how to motivate and work with both minority and majority groups. It also refers to knowing where resources are and how to access them.

**Yvonne:** According to The Conference Board, successful diversity and inclusion practitioners are not only strategic leaders, they are also visionaries.

They envision diversity and inclusion success for their organization and convey that vision in a manner that rouses the enthusiasm of others.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners are imaginative and innovative, and yet not just dreamers.

They understand the business realities of their organization, and they ground their visions of the future in pragmatic strategies.

Within the category of “Visionary and Strategic Leadership,” The Conference Board identifies three competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

“Diversity and Inclusion Future State” refers to collaborating appropriately with others to envision and convey an inspiring, compelling, and relevant future state of diversity and inclusion.

It also refers to actively seeking new ideas, experiences, and thought leaders. And BEING a catalyst for change, framing new directions in understandable, innovative, and inspiring terms.

“Pragmatism” refers to differentiating between strategy and tactics and being pragmatic about working within existing business realities

It also refers to creating alignment with customers, business partners, and other stakeholders, and proactively creating the foundation for influence at all levels of the organization.

“Political Savoir-Faire” refers to knowing to whom and where to go to get things done.

It also refers to collaborating with other functional areas to maximize outcomes for all concerned.

It includes the ability to facilitate and manage complex and sensitive matters, and the ability to influence others at all levels of the organization.

**Thomas:** As The Conference Board points out in its report, diversity and inclusion practitioners act as expert resources to their colleagues in human resources.

For that role, diversity and inclusion practitioners must understand the various human resource disciplines and their inter-relationship with diversity and inclusion.

Not only do diversity and inclusion practitioners offer HR professionals insight into legal compliance issues related to diversity and inclusion...

They also identify opportunities for total rewards, talent management, organizational development, work/life balance, training, and employee relations.

Within the category of "HR Disciplines," The Conference Board identifies three competencies for diversity and inclusion practitioners:

"Total Rewards, Talent Management, Organizational Development, Work/Life Balance, and Training" refers to understanding the basic tenets and workings of compensation and benefits programs, policies, and best practices.

It also refers to providing program options that ensure equitable treatment and mitigate disparities.

Diversity and inclusion practitioners need to possess knowledge of programs, policies, and best practices that ensure equity and achievement of organizational objectives in a variety of HR areas.

For example: recruitment, retention, training, development, performance management, succession planning, and work/life balance.

"Compliance" refers to understanding applicable laws, regulations, and government requirements and their impact on business.

It also refers to ensuring compliance through effective programs, policies, and practices.

"Employee Relations" refers to working with others to resolve individual and group conflict, and sustaining and improving the work environment in the face of change.

**Thomas:** As The Conference Board points out in its report, rarely will you find a diversity and inclusion practitioner who demonstrates mastery of the entire set of competencies.

Higher-level practitioners, such as an organization's chief diversity officer, should demonstrate mastery of most of the competencies, and should also have the ability to identify, recruit, and lead others who have the required skills.

**Yvonne:** A copy of The Conference Board's report is available on The Conference Board Web site.

But that's all we have time for in this edition of Diversity News. We certainly appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

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.

**Thomas:** And check out our bimonthly newsletter, Diversity@Work, available as a download on our Web site or by e-mail from our office.

And if you have any comments about, or suggestions for, Diversity News, please e-mail us at [dmeeo@va.gov](mailto:dmeeo@va.gov).

Until next time...

**Both:** Have a great month!