

Working Together

Meeting the Challenges of Workforce Diversity

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INTRODUCTION

If you walked into a public office in the 1950s, you would probably see a workforce segregated by race and gender, if diversity existed at all. Managerial jobs would be held by white men, clerical staff with strictly limited duties would be women, and if any persons of color were in evidence they would likely be limited to men in manual or janitorial jobs. Today, in most organizations one expects to see a different picture, with a mixed group of employees working at all levels and decision-making capacities throughout the organization.

As the workforce in organizations has moved from homogeneous to mixed groups of individuals, employees now interact with co-workers, clients, supervisors or employees of different ethnicities and cultures, as part of daily work life. For some individuals, this may by itself be a novelty and a learning experience. In the same way, managers face a new set of challenges and functions as organizations have become more diverse. They must figure out how to adjust organizational structures and cultures to capitalize on this diversity, thus ensuring both quality of work life and organizational effectiveness.

For both program and human resource (HR) managers, meeting the imperative of diversity takes time, effort, and commitment. Yet it must be done, in order to meet legal, demographic, social, ethical, and strategic requirements and expectations from all the stakeholders of a public agency—clients, managers, staff, elected officials, taxpayers, and suppliers. Traditional affirmative action and equal employment opportunity efforts remain important but are not sufficient to manage today's diverse workforce effectively, if organizations wish to remain competitive

both in the public (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board [MSPB], 1993) and private sectors (Jackson and Schuller, 2000).

As organizations become more demographically diverse in response to external and internal pressures, managers must monitor the extent to which their practices reflect these changes. They must adjust the workplace accordingly, so that the organization's primary resource—its people—feel welcome and valued as individuals and as organizational citizens. Furthermore, in public bureaucracies the diversity agenda also responds to the mandate of constituting a governmental workforce that adequately reflects the diversity of the population it serves (Pynes, 1997).

Today, state of the art management literature in both public and private sectors views workforce diversity not as a problem to be managed away but as an opportunity to enhance personal and organizational effectiveness (Gentile, 1996). Diversity management is, nevertheless, a challenge, and cannot happen without organizational leadership, vision, and commitment. All members of the organization must *choose* to meet the challenge and all managers—senior, departmental, and HR—must assume the responsibility. A partnership between HR and line managers can contribute greatly to achieve diversity success.

In this chapter we provide an overview of the problems and prospects of addressing the diversity challenge and discuss the meanings of diversity and different approaches to creating diversity in public organizations. To do so, the chapter is structured in four sections. After providing an example of a diversity initiative in the public sector, we introduce and define the concept of workforce diversity, and describe the various approaches used to address it as an organizational and managerial challenge. In the next section we discuss the factors and conditions required to maximize the advantages of a diverse workforce and present guiding frameworks for managers. Finally, we explore the idea of a partnership between HR and program managers, and some implications for managing a diverse workforce in public organizations.

A PUBLIC SECTOR INITIATIVE: SAN DIEGO'S DIVERSITY COMMITMENT

The City of San Diego's "Diversity Commitment" illustrates the complexity of diversity efforts, as well as the range of stakeholders and strategies involved and potential benefits of its thoughtful implementation (Dobbs, 1996). This initiative was triggered by a request from the city manager for a training program on diversity. The director of the city's Office of Organizational Effectiveness studied initiatives in the public and private sectors and decided to recommend instead an organizationwide culture change.

To pursue this agenda, a Diversity Team of four persons was formed as a steering committee, but members from all levels of the organization were invited to participate. Short- and long-term strategies were developed based on a detailed diagnosis, which included employee focus groups and action planning. Designed as a comprehensive initiative, the Commitment intends to create an environment in which differences are valued and all employees participate in team service delivery.

Interventions in the San Diego initiative included short-term strategies such as: creating multicultural and bi-gender interview panels to increase representation in the promotion and selection processes; introducing diversity modules in supervisory and management training programs; and forming task forces to address the priorities identified by employees for career development, communication, and promotions. For the long term, San Diego is implementing changes in policies and procedures and a broad employee communications effort. This includes monthly meetings of the Diversity Team with employee associations, unions, informal city employee groups, and representatives of police and fire department HR divisions, and a forum with managerial and union participation to discuss and resolve diversity issues as they arise.

The San Diego Commitment illustrates some of the best practices in public and private sector diversity efforts. Note the variety of stakeholders involved in this effort—it's a partnership! The Diversity Commitment effort is the shared responsibility of all the management of the City of San Diego as an organization (HR managers, program managers, and top managers). And the specification of long- and short-term goals suggests that San Diego's managers expect diversity to be an ongoing, evolving process.

However, while the San Diego example highlights only the positive side of the story, the literature suggests that there are also obstacles and challenges in diversity-related change processes (Jackson and Associates, 1992; Ospina, 1996a). Designing and implementing a diversity initiative is a complex managerial agenda that demands sensitivity and skills from the manager, as well as thoughtful and careful preparation for its success throughout the organization. The issues and dimensions to be considered include, among others, clarifying what diversity means, distinguishing among various approaches to diversity, understanding what makes a workplace diverse, deciding how to choose the right strategies and steps to pursue this goal and determining who will be accountable for the effort. In the following sections of this chapter we will address these issues one at a time.

It may be too early to assess the impact of the San Diego effort. However, lessons from the literature suggest that managers in this City can expect to reap many benefits if they continue their diversity commitment. Indeed, much has been written about the benefits associated with implementing a successful diversity agenda. Applying them to the public sector, Ospina (1996a) summarized the most cited benefits of increased workforce diversity and classified them according to the types of gains, considering ethical, legal, public policy, HR management, and organizational benefits.

The ethical benefits are that diversity promotes fairness and justice in the workplace, and it helps create economic opportunity and reduce social inequality. Among the legal and public policy benefits are greater compliance with HR legal requirements, increased representation and responsiveness in the bureaucracy, and increased grassroots support for agency programs and policies. Among the identified HRM benefits are increased competitiveness in recruitment and selection by enhancing the agency's reputation and ability to attract and keep the best employees, and promoting creative and innovative approaches to work. Organizational benefits include increased internal capabilities due to greater organizational flexibility and ability to address change and greater fluidity in organizational de-

sign, decreased discrimination litigation, and increased organizational legitimacy due to enhanced reputation and higher effectiveness.

San Diego's initiative illustrates only one of many possible strategies to address the diversity challenge in a particular organization. However, there is no one best way to do so. For example, Baytos (1995) provides an inventory of approximately 275 activities related to diversity. These programs include "pure" diversity initiatives as well as mixed affirmative action and work and family activities, designed to operate in conjunction with broader diversity efforts. All together, they represent efforts that influence almost every aspect of the employment relationship. The number and the variety of these strategies, and the originality of San Diego's initiative, point to two important considerations: first, pursuing diversity requires creativity in design and implementation; second, diversity has become an integral aspect of effective management in contemporary organizations.

DEFINING DIVERSITY: AN ORGANIZATIONAL AND MANAGERIAL CHALLENGE

At the most general level, Gentile (1996) suggests that in the United States diversity has become a code word to discuss issues related to the impact of various types of difference on individual's and groups' life experiences. Diversity can therefore be studied at a societal level or within particular institutions. When considering diversity in organizations, Gentile includes three categories of organizational diversity: structural diversity (differences based on organizational functions—administrative vs. operational employees, for example), business diversity (different markets, products, and services), and workforce diversity.

Workforce diversity refers to the variety of identities of the employees in the organization, such as their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, age, family status, economic, educational, and geographic background and status. It can also encompass behavioral diversity such as differences in learning, communication, and work styles among individual employees (Loden and Rosener, 1991).

Workforce diversity may be characterized in different ways, as well. Occupational diversity encompasses the range of occupations employed to fulfill the mission (e.g., engineers vs. nurses). Professional diversity focuses on the range of training and professional degrees an organization requires from its members. And social diversity refers to variations in the characteristics that identify a person with a given "cultural" community or group identity.

In this chapter we focus specifically on diversity related to group identities because, from an HRM perspective, this type of workforce diversity offers the hardest challenges to managers. The infinite combinations of these primary and secondary social attributes produce the particular "social types" that make up an organization's workforce (Ospina, 1996a), and the particular challenges of diversity. Social diversity involves both self-definition and attributes perceived by others (Cox, 1993; Zuckerman and Simons, 1996). Each employee of an organization fits into several potential diversity categories. Parts of peoples' identities occur simultaneously, so that a "typical" black employee may be a member of a certain

religion, could be gay or straight, or may have a disability not readily apparent to the naked eye.

Finally, diversity management cannot promise—nor should it—that public agency clients will only be served by employees who “look” like them. That would mean a return to segregation. Instead, in a diverse setting most clients will see people who look like them serving in all capacities in the agency’s work. Achieving this requires a conscious strategy to develop a balanced approach to manage workforce diversity in public agencies.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY EFFORTS: NARROW, BROAD, AND BALANCED APPROACHES

The following examples of diversity statements show how one public service and one nonprofit organization choose to define and approach the diversity challenge:

“Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare is committed to increasing the diversity of staff at all levels while paying special attention to improving the representation of women and minorities in key positions to creating an inclusive, respectful and equitable environment; to serving our diverse members with culturally sensitive services; and to changing the organizational culture through leadership, policies and practices” (Society for Human Resources Management [SHRM] Home Page, 2000).

“The Postal Service requires new thinking and new structures that regard Diversity Development as fundamental to business success to achieve our corporate strategic goals. Diversity is that which makes each of us unique. It can be our birthplace, education, age, gender, neighborhood, race, social circle, economic status, values, skills, appearance, lifestyle, etc. Valuing diversity is accepting and appreciating people’s uniqueness. Developing diversity involves building tools and nurturing a culture that fully utilizes uniqueness and talent to support the organization’s goals” (U.S. Postal Service, 1999).

These statements illustrate subtle differences in the approach each organization takes to achieve diversity. The differences refer to how broad or narrow each approach is, a choice that managers must make when planning a diversity effort. The practice-based literature on diversity management emphasizes a broad definition of diversity, such as the ones proposed by the U.S. Postal Service above. In this view, differences in personality, work style, and visible manifestations of diversity are considered critical resources as organizations move toward more flexible, team-based arrangements for service provision.

In contrast, as illustrated by the Harvard Pilgrim HealthCare approach, the research-based diversity literature pays particular attention to what the law calls “protected classes,” that is, women, racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities (and in some jurisdictions, but not all, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals). There is a reason behind this focus. Pynes (1997) argues that emphasis on a “narrow” focus may stem from the historical need to create incentives via legislation, executive orders, and administrative rulings, to combat past and current discrimination against these groups. Indeed, without these incentives, organizations would be less diverse today.

Both approaches to diversity have advantages and disadvantages that need to be considered when making organizational choices around diversity efforts. The broad approach places diversity within a context that expands beyond compliance to the law, thus linking the mandate of managing diversity to the strategic concerns of the organization. The danger, however, in the broad approach is that managers can easily ignore the patterns of organizational inequality to which certain groups have been subjected by ignoring institutionalized discrimination. In this case, managing diversity can become just a “nice” public relations program rather than a sustained effort to ensure organizational equality and fairness in the work place. The narrow approach has the advantage of directly calling attention to the existing patterns of inequality to explicitly identify and interrupt practices that reproduce such disparities.

The management literature seems to favor a broad definition over a narrow one. In this view, the ultimate goal of diversity is an organization that serves its stakeholders creatively and effectively because it draws on many talents in its work. Moreover, with too narrow a focus, those threatened by the diversity efforts may try to minimize them by associating them with low quality, rather than with better outcomes. Adapting policies and procedures to a broad definition of diversity may thus help the organization avoid the resistance that diversity efforts sometimes inspire.

Thomas (1991) argues that both approaches to diversity are necessary: without rigorous “narrow” efforts to recruit and promote persons not part of the dominant social groups, no “new faces” will enter the organization or managerial ranks. But without a “broad” organizational adjustment to make the organization a welcoming place to the new faces, those persons will soon leave the organization for more rewarding professional and personal opportunities. When that happens, the organization loses the experience of that employee and incurs the costs of recruiting and training a replacement.

FROM EEO/AA TO VALUING, MANAGING, AND MAXIMIZING DIVERSITY

In its most simplistic form—and in an approach originally adopted in the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972—diversity in the workplace was measured by counting the number of employees that fit into each of the desired “social categories” and creating “quotas” where there were gaps. Perceptions that people were hired and promoted based on their social characteristics rather than on job-related skills led to a backlash to outright quotas. This has influenced popular conceptions of diversity management, which is frequently confused with affirmative action. While the latter is an important effort in and of itself, it should not be equated with the former.

Despite the presentation in the literature of logical steps leading to a more diverse work place, the transition is not always smooth. Few diversity efforts in the beginning happened spontaneously, and some were a response to demands from different groups that produced changes in legislation. For example, women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, older employees, and gays and lesbians have traditionally been the target of discrimination. Some identity groups have

started to challenge their previously marginalized status and to demand equal treatment in the workplace (Cozzetto et al., 1996; Crampton et al., 1996; Lewis, 1997).

Since the mid-1960s, three distinct phases of diversity management have evolved. In theory, the phases take place sequentially, but in practice many organizations implement aspects of all three phases simultaneously. First, affirmative action and equal opportunity employment policies created legal obligations based on numerical measures to increase the representation of minorities and women in many areas of employment and, in general, to reduce discriminatory practices. Later, to try to change the workplace culture once persons from different backgrounds were in the organization, many workplaces instituted awareness courses and celebrations of diverse characteristics (i.e., "Black History Month") in a strategy broadly known as Valuing Diversity. These activities were often isolated from organizational strategy or job needs, however.

Finally, a new type of effort, known as "managing diversity," has developed in response to the earlier phases not being fully effective. It connects work changes and different methods of accomplishing organizational goals to workforce diversity. Thomas (1991) defines it as "a comprehensive managerial approach aimed at creating an organizational environment that works naturally—without special effort, consideration, or programs—for all employees, regardless of how different they might be. This approach helps managers inspire employees to give their best to an organization" (p. 24). While respecting legal requirements, this approach to diversity is not implemented just for compliance or to avoid lawsuits. Instead, diversity is maximized when managers see its strategic connection to business and when employees who are part of a diverse workforce are viewed and treated as individuals with unique contributions to organizational goals.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE DIVERSITY CAN THRIVE

Today, the state of the art in both public and private management views workforce diversity as an imperative for organizational effectiveness and a requirement to gain competitive advantage. Indeed, managerial understanding of the diversity challenge is rooted less on a moral mandate toward equity and justice and more on environmental pressures that managers must address when creating and implementing organizational strategy.

Efforts pursued by the California Franchise Tax Board (FTB) illustrate how environmental forces can motivate an organization's managers to pursue workforce diversity (Barzelay and Moukheibir, 1993). In the early 1990s, FTB, California's main revenue agency, started a corporate strategy to deal with the challenges of recruiting, training, and retaining the employees needed to fulfill its mission. Among these pressures, FTB's leaders identified: a) the changing demographics of a shrinking labor force in the state of California; b) rapid changes in the technology to achieve FTB's core tasks, which required more frequent retraining of existing employees; and c) an increasing sense that the agency's workforce represented a broad range of ethnic, cultural, occupational, and educational backgrounds with very different needs, values, and skills.

After surveying employees and identifying best practices by benchmarking with several large private employers, FTB management designed a four-part strategy for diversity. The strategy included: 1) implementing flexible, on-site, training programs appropriate to every level of the organization; 2) working with local schools, junior colleges, and universities to help design educational strategies and to build bridges between these institutions and employment opportunities at FTB; 3) increasing the agency's visibility among professionals in key fields; and 4) creating a comprehensive, organizationwide employee support and development system offering employee assistance in critical areas identified by employees themselves, such as child care, financial planning, substance abuse, commuting to work, and preventive health care. With these strategies, FTB sought to build an organization in which all felt welcome and able to thrive and advance.

The specific demographic and diversity changes that exert pressures on an agency's management may vary, but they affect all public organizations. In FTB's case, as in many other public agencies, the demand for public services was increasing and managers knew they could not compete with the salaries private sector employers offered the professionals needed to do the job. As for most organizations, when the workforce became diverse, strategies for training and compensation had to incorporate new options, and thus become diverse, also.

MOTIVATIONS TO ADDRESS THE DIVERSITY CHALLENGE

Among the motivations that move managers to think about and address diversity, the following are particularly pertinent to public agencies: legal and regulatory pressures, changes in labor market demographics, and a diversifying client base. In addition, external social pressure may be a critical motivator in some cases. For example, community, religious, and/or political groups and coalitions may object to particular products, services, or ways in which these are offered to particular populations and clients, or may apply pressure for greater representation of particular groups in the organization's workforce.

Similarly, internal employee pressures may generate interest in diversity efforts. For example, employees may defend their rights or respond to perceptions of unfairness, discrimination, or harassment by filing complaints and/or engaging in behaviors such as turnover, absenteeism, conflict, lower productivity, and even sabotage. They may also request new policies and procedures that respond to their particular needs, such as flexible schedule and benefit policies. Finally, individual leaders and managers who view diversity as an important organizational issue may become personally committed to championing efforts to ensure fairness and employee well-being in the work place (Gentile, 1996).

These pressures, argues Gentile, can trigger managerial responses that range from reluctant compliance (following the letter of the law without addressing the real issues), to creative strategies that address diversity as a whole rather than considering issues in isolation: The literature indicates that managers in high-performance organizations do not necessarily wait until these pressures affect them directly. Instead, taking a strategic approach, they anticipate the changes and address the issues that will help the organization position itself within its competitive environment in a proactive rather than in a reactive way.

As organizations become more diverse and are affected by broader societal changes toward more participatory and inclusive forms of governance, traditional organizational structures, systems, and cultures will have to be transformed accordingly. Employees also need to be able to work in diverse teams, but they (and managers) may not have the skills to do so. In this context, a diversity effort becomes a strategic managerial tool and diversity success becomes a desirable outcome.

TOWARD DIVERSITY SUCCESS: CONFRONTING THE REALITIES AND PURSUING A VISION

The lack of diversity affects organizational performance. There are also costs of ignoring diversity issues in the workforce or of merely assuming a window-dressing response to the mentioned pressures for inclusiveness. Consider the following diversity-related incidents:

Example 1. A Midwestern state's Department of Health and Welfare is responsible for all statewide health programs and its welfare program. Its affirmative action plan documents a demographic composition of 750 employees that matches well the population of the Midwest state where the agency is located, with African Americans representing the largest minority group. But the agency has had three lawsuits claiming discrimination and wrongful discharge in the last five years. Employees complain that groups are slotted into certain jobs, and that the agency had a hostile environment to racial minorities. Some African Americans have reported instances of name-calling, racial jokes and minor damage to cars. They mentioned that the few Hispanics seem to be promoted faster, and that all Asian Americans are in well-paying information systems positions. The Native Americans, on the other hand, who are employed in clerical, janitorial, or driver positions, have not complained, but there is an unusually high turnover in these positions (Powell, 1994).

Example 2. A Nassau County, N.Y. correction officer was awarded over \$1.5 million by a federal jury in July 2000 after suing for suffering antigay harassment. The man said he was subject to three years of assaults, taunts, and insults, and posting of offensive materials in his locker and in public areas where both inmates and fellow staff members could see them. He finally left the force after his supervisors refused several requests to curtail the harassment. Although there are no federal, state, or county laws prohibiting harassment based on sexual orientation, the man's lawyers successfully sued under the federal Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment for equal protection under the law. It was the second time in a year Nassau County municipal officials were assessed monetary damages for allowing antigay harassment against an employee (LeDuff, 2000).

These cases illustrate fairly common incidents. Similar examples still abound in public and private workplaces. They reflect undesirable organizational consequences of discrimination or patterns of social exclusion in society as they have been translated into the world of work. They also illustrate the potential impact of diversity-related incidents as they affect, in the first case, entire groups of employees, and in the second case, a single employee. Finally, they show the difficult work environments that managers and organizations face and the danger of ignoring

diversity-related situations as they get expressed at work. To say the least, the uncomfortable environment created by poorly handled diversity conflicts affects both managers and employees across an organization.

The extent to which the described situations developed, and their outcomes, depended greatly on factors such as the degree of sensitivity of the managers involved, the willingness of the affected employees to voice their concern (and the ways in which they did so), the lack of an articulated diversity approach or strategy in the organization, and the extent to which HR and program managers worked together to address the issues once they surfaced. Leaving the issues unresolved was not an option—faced with employees demanding recognition, the organizational climate would only deteriorate and legal liabilities might ensue (and did in the New York example).

The organizational costs of not attending to workforce diversity challenges are both material and symbolic. Indeed, equity and fairness issues are not disconnected from the organization's bottom line nor from employees' responses to the experience of work (Ospina, 1996b). Unresolved diversity problems can result in consequences such as: diverting scarce financial and human resources to deal with litigation or to pay punitive damages; losing good employees and having to defray additional expenses to identify and recruit their replacements; managing conflict among diverse groups or dealing with resultant low employee morale; and creating a reputation that the organization is not a good place to work.

Organizations vary according to the degree to which they reflect these broader exclusionary patterns and the traditional employment practices that produce them. These variations are evidenced in the differences in demographic composition, that is, how homogeneous or how mixed the workforce is, as well as in the way that the organization's culture, structures, policies, systems, human resource practices, and overall HR philosophy fit the requirements of its diverse employees. Only by knowing where an organization is in terms of its diversity can its managers develop strategies to move forward toward diversity success.

THE "DIVERSITY CONTINUUM": ORGANIZATIONAL TYPES AND DIVERSITY PHILOSOPHIES

Diversity scholars have developed helpful typologies that allow an observer to assess an organization's closeness or its distance from achieving diversity success. Cox (1993) and Minors (1996) classify organizations according to the degree to which they use exclusionary practices. They identify three organizational types that are part of what Minors calls a "continuum of growth" from discrimination to nondiscrimination.

The first is the "monolithic organization," where most employees are similar in terms of their primary and secondary characteristics and where the culture and systems value and reward only those who conform to the characteristics of the dominant group. In these organizations the dominant group's standards are universally applied, and informal communications, networks, and key decision-making bodies are closed to nondominant employees (Loden and Rosener, 1991).

Typically, monolithic organizations will be characterized by a series of undesirable organizational features which prevent deserving employees from moving laterally to better positions or upward to positions of prestige and responsibility.

The reproduction of sexist, ageist, homophobic, and other stereotyped attitudes and behaviors may also result in hostile work environments for those who do not happen to be part of the dominant group. A good illustration of this practice is presented in Example 2, where the New York correction officer was penalized for not complying with the dominant heterosexual lifestyle.

In the middle of the continuum, nondiscriminatory organizations have begun to work on the agenda of inclusiveness. But because they do not challenge or change structures, systems, and modes of delivery, these organizations hold the same underlying assumptions as the discriminatory ones, with similar consequences, despite their good intentions. Cox calls this type "the plural organization." It has a mixed group of employees but the systems and culture are still highly influenced by the values of one dominant group. A good illustration is Example 1, in which the Department of Health and Welfare employees don't feel treated on equal terms.

The third organizational type is the multicultural or antidiscriminatory organization, in which the systems and culture foster, value, and reward differences as potential organizational assets and where the demographic composition reflects such philosophy and practices. In this organizational type, managers have an explicit philosophy and practice social inclusion. They make efforts to redress power inequities, work actively to eliminate all forms of oppression, and are responsive to the various constituencies they serve as well as reflecting them in their workforce.

In Minors's words, an organization in the antidiscriminatory stage "reflects the contributions and interests of various groups in its mission and operations. Members of the larger community participate at all levels and help make decisions that shape the organization and influence its direction. . . . Its members support efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression and to enhance the work of all." These organizations "are equitable, responsive and accessible at all levels" (p. 204).

The third organizational type in both Minors's and Cox's schemes allows us to imagine what diversity success would look like. Minors also helps us consider the importance of addressing diversity issues with respect to organizational stakeholders other than employees, thus maximizing the knowledge, skills, and talents of staff, volunteers, and community members.

Efforts to move from discriminatory to nondiscriminatory practices vary depending on the underlying diversity philosophy of the managers involved. According to Thomas and Ely (1996) some efforts are based in a philosophy that aims to achieve proportional representation, but also expects all employees to assimilate to the dominant culture. Deviations from the norm are viewed at a minimum as a nuisance. Other efforts acknowledge diversity inasmuch as it helps target minority consumer groups. In this approach, diverse employees are not allowed to integrate their unique features into the larger organization but instead are often pigeonholed and valued only because they interact with customers of similar backgrounds.

Finally, in some organizations employees are not pegged to market niches; they are encouraged to use their diverse backgrounds to enhance productivity, to create new opportunities, and to develop new systems and strategies. Furthermore, managers are open to innovation, creativity, and diversity in perspectives to problem solving and decision making. This description represents the ultimate vision

for those who want to pursue the diversity challenge. It represents the desired diversity philosophy, one that would be typical of antidiscriminatory, multicultural organizations.

Being consistent with this philosophy is not an easy task. Despite the best intentions, if not handled well, diversity efforts may in fact, backfire. Because more diversity may increase the potential for ambiguity and complexity in an organization, it may also enhance the risk for confusion, miscommunication, and conflict (Adler, 1988). These consequences must be managed too. Consider the following example: In the local branch of a governmental organization that has implemented a solid diversity initiative for several years, a group of gay employees posted information on a bulletin board regarding a gay pride festival. Management received several calls from individuals who felt that the posting was inappropriate. Instead of brainstorming for solutions with employees, or providing sensitivity training about sexual orientation, management simply removed the posting. A few weeks later, a Christian prayer group held a vigil in the cafeteria. Some Jewish employees felt that the vigil should be addressed in the same manner as the gay pride posting. Conflict between identity groups escalated until the branch received direct command from headquarters to re-post the gay pride information.

The HR Department then decided that identity groups would have to obtain approval before posting any information or conducting any celebrations. However, there was no attempt to use conflict resolution to promote integration and inclusiveness among employees, who remained pigeonholed to their own identity groups (Chu et al., 1999). In this case, while resolving the conflict, managers lost an opportunity to move toward a true multicultural environment.

Addressing the diversity challenge successfully requires not only implementing the right programs, but also managing the consequences that follow in ways consistent with the desired diversity philosophy. Moreover, if there are stages in the "diversity continuum" it may be helpful to define the challenge of diversity as an evolutionary process highly sensitive to circumstances and context.

TOWARD A DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONTINGENT APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

Organizing a set of diversity initiatives by itself is not a guarantee for diversity success. According to Dass and Parker (1999) organizational efforts to address diversity may be episodic, freestanding, or systemic. There are many diversity initiatives that are put into place in an isolated and disjointed (episodic) manner, usually not integrated into core organizational activities, and often appearing in response to a single threat or incident. In other cases, freestanding diversity efforts offer formalized and regular activities that are still not integrated to the organization's core and often do not form a set of coherent strategies. In contrast, some diversity efforts are linked to existing systems and core organizational activities to form a coherent whole. In these efforts, responsibility for diversity is assigned to both line and HR managers.

How can managers make sure that their efforts are proactive, systemic and strategic enough to generate the desired impact? In the same way that each organization must determine the overall strategy to accomplish its mission, it must

also determine and tailor its diversity agenda accordingly. The mandate of diversity is contingent on the organization's overall strategy, and also on its demographic profile, which must be understood and documented through careful study. Only then can managers decide the type of diversity strategies to put into place.

Organizations cannot skip steps. First, there must be agreement among the leadership about the desire to move forward toward "diversity success." Once this happens, programs and strategies must be based on a diagnosis of the organization's stage in the "diversity continuum" (between discriminatory and nondiscriminatory, from monolithic to multicultural). Championing and implementing a diversity vision will require a well thought-out plan and specific managerial strategies that respect the developmental nature of the change process. For example, an organization that has a homogeneous workforce cannot manage diversity, it must first pursue strategies to become diverse (Ospina, 1996a).

Using Cox's classification, Ospina proposes a framework that builds on this developmental and contingent nature of the diversity challenge. She describes the type of efforts that are most likely to succeed at each level, as managers try to move the organization from exclusion to diversity. Along this progressive movement, Ospina proposes to differentiate among four consecutive managerial tasks: *considering, pursuing, managing, and maximizing* diversity, depending on the organization's place in the diversity continuum.

When *considering* diversity, organizational stakeholders get involved in tasks that help them become aware of the benefits of increased diversity (and recognize the monolithic nature of the organization). Examples of strategies to consider diversity include: performing a diversity audit, conducting exit interviews or promoting core groups of managers to meet regularly to discuss diversity.

When *pursuing* diversity, managers look for strategies to create a diverse workforce (and try to move from the monolithic to the plural stage). Strategies to pursue diversity include: conducting periodic voluntary employee surveys to identify barriers, creating task forces to propose innovative plans to attract diverse employees, focusing on EEO techniques, and doing cultural assessments, etc.

When *managing* diversity, leaders find ways to support the now diverse workforce (making the organization more pluralistic). Strategies to manage diversity include: promoting networks, support groups, and internal advocacy groups; doing compensation equity analysis, creating mentoring programs, and designing career-development programs as well as job rotation programs to open up opportunities; and using conflict resolution techniques whenever diversity-related issues emerge.

And finally, when *maximizing* diversity, managers use the workforce strategically to add value to the organization's strategic goals by supporting the unique contributions each organizational member brings, independent of their background (striving to become a multicultural organization). Examples of maximizing diversity include: creating diverse teams throughout the organization, including diversity in managers' performance evaluations, goals, ratings, and promotion decisions; adding new benefits and new choices within the existing ones to encompass a broader range of employee benefit options; developing managerial succession plans; and continuously introducing new policies as new issues are identified.

These stages are not mutually exclusive, but instead, the lower-level ones continue to be developed when the organization moves to higher stages in the diversity growth continuum. For example, as managers try to maximize and manage

diversity, they must also continue to consider the need for future diversity and pursue what will become the next generations of employees.

A final managerial consideration is: Where should diversity initiatives be placed in an organization and who should administer them? This issue has generated considerable debate among practitioners and scholars (Baytos, 1995; Jackson and Schuller, 2000). Some argue that a program to promote organizational diversity that is embedded in the human resource department is at risk of being marginalized or becoming a simple bureaucratic hoop that department managers feel they must pass through without really being a part of it. Others argue, however, that if the diversity initiatives of an organization are not centrally organized, the activities pertaining to diversity will get lost in the shuffle as line managers deal with the demands of production.

The solution to this dilemma lies, again, in considering the developmental and contingent nature of the process to achieve diversity success. Depending on the organization's attainment of diversity to date, its diversity initiatives may be organized in a separate function, when much remains to be done, and become more integrated as the organization becomes more sophisticated and sensitive to diversity. In the first case, for example, an organizational unit, task force or manager will be charged with championing the diversity mandate. In the second case, diversity efforts are incorporated in all units, and indicators of diversity success become part of the managerial performance appraisal. Ideally, the diversity challenge is woven into the organization's strategic goals, systems and functions, and overall management decisions, and becomes embedded in all practices and routines of the organization. This state is typical of a multicultural organization.

DIVERSITY AND THE PERSONNEL FUNCTION: A NEEDED PARTNERSHIP TO CREATE, MANAGE, AND MAXIMIZE A DIVERSE WORKFORCE.

The recognition of the strategic importance of diversity to recruiting and managing employees while serving an expanding base of clients leads to the necessity of personnel and line managers working together on all aspects of diversity. It also leads to the need to adopt a broader definition of diversity, including a recognition that each employee of an organization fits into several potential diversity categories, without ignoring the importance of continuing to "protect" the most vulnerable categories to avoid backlash.

Managing workforce diversity represents an important HRM responsibility that is shared by both personnel specialists and program managers (Jackson and Schuller, 2000). The latter are responsible for embracing the diversity philosophy and effectively developing and implementing organization policy. Personnel managers, in turn, are responsible for the design and maintenance of HRM systems that will support the successful execution of policies and programs that sustain the philosophy. Personnel and program managers, therefore, work in partnership to ensure that the diversity challenge is woven into the organizational strategic goals, systems and functions, and the overall management decisions, thus becoming embedded in all practices and routines, rather than being conceived as isolated programs.

The core HR functions—recruitment, hiring, staffing, compensation, performance management, training and development, labor relations, occupational safety and health and workforce planning—must be executed in a way that ties together the organization's needs for excellence and the requirements for diversity. In addition to applying these activities to individuals and groups, the human resource manager concerned with recruiting, managing, and retaining a diverse workforce will also need to actively train managers and supervisors in managing the diversity challenge itself. Training can help managers and their employees in several ways. For example, Valuing Diversity and cultural awareness workshops can help prevent overt and subtle intolerant attitudes; training in sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination avoidance can limit exposure to lawsuits and prevent valued employees from feeling that they must leave; and enhanced sensitivity can help managers identify needs such as skills-training for employees, avoiding ageism, or reducing homophobia.

The challenges of creating, managing, and maximizing diversity, however, span the entire organization. Diversity responsibility may cycle between personnel and program managers: personnel managers adjust policies and set expectations and program managers implement new procedures to nurture them. The partnership fails if either side falters in their role or if one fails to see the importance of the other. For example, while personnel managers must consider legal restraints, program managers and personnelists together need to consider options for reducing barriers to entry and advancement within an organization to truly achieve diversity. Consider the case of persons for whom dyslexia or learning disabilities create obstacles to attain a job in which they can perform well, or persons for whom English is not their first language. Special accommodations such as providing extra time to complete entry exams might be possible to ensure equal opportunity and a broader range of candidates in the competition for desired jobs. Challenging a traditional view, this approach invites employers to consider disabled employees as individuals offering "a non-standard bundle of abilities . . . and skills" rather than considering them less able employees (Veiga et al., 1999:p. 86).

Indeed, managers and personnel professionals must work together on the accommodations required—by law or by choice—to fulfill commitments to diversity. Accommodations for religion and disability must often be implemented, for example, but such actions need not cost the organization too greatly. A study published in 2000 showed that the average firm in the New York City area spent less than \$300 per employee to meet disability access standards, including equipment purchases and training needs (Koss-Felder, 2000).

Program managers and personnel professionals may actively collaborate in innovative recruitment, as well. They must make efforts to search for alternative sources of recruitment to increase the pool of candidates. For example, one such source has been developed by the American College of Healthcare Executives, through a job bank for prospective candidates in their World Wide Web site. With the explicit intent of reaching out to minority prospects for health care management positions, lists of potential employers, mentors, and other discussion groups and networking possibilities have broadened access to a wide number of people. Over 500 job candidates and 200 potential mentors signed up to the site in its first few months of operation (see www.diversityconnection.com for information) (Moore, 1999).

In setting compensation, employers that offer "cafeteria" plans allow employees to choose the benefits that favor them personally. For example, older workers, and some lesbian and gay employees, may not find health insurance for dependents as attractive as other options, and lower-skilled workers may prefer to use flex time and educational benefits to obtain the training they need to advance. Working together to explore what is the appropriate combination for each organization is a joint task for program and personnel managers.

In several ways human resource professionals can lead the partnership: They have knowledge of the benchmarks for obtaining diversity in a particular sector, knowledge of consultants, training needs, and a mandate to provide organizational perspective. For program managers, additional "people" skills are needed to manage a diverse workforce, in contrast to those needed to manage the daily functions of their department. Managing a diverse workforce effectively requires creating a nurturing environment that builds upon individual strengths and on respect for people's uniqueness. Managers must learn to build, maintain, and manage relationships based on true empathy, understanding, and genuineness. The skills to accomplish this—difficult to learn and often time-consuming to implement—must be exercised while maintaining a focus on excellence of product and service, attaining the organization's goals, and dealing with stakeholder demands and changes in the environment.

CONCLUSION

Whether managers choose to implement a narrow or a broad approach to diversity, in the most effective organizations program managers and human resource managers have a common desire to make workforce diversity become "normal." In these organizations, understanding and valuing differences and promoting employee development are critical human resource management goals, and diversity is a strategic imperative for all managers. Ultimately, the diversity partnership must bring together human resource specialists and program managers to ensure that their efforts coincide in creating a workplace in which:

- The workforce adequately mirrors the demographic composition of the larger community the agency serves.
- All employees feel they are treated as unique individuals whose identities and abilities are not only respected but also appreciated for their contributions to the organization.
- The right policies, systems, and processes exist to ensure the agency's ability to attract, retain, and develop employees with diverse backgrounds and qualifications that help them maximize the organization's mission.
- Traditional segregation among job classifications, such as women in clerical positions and people of color in maintenance positions, no longer exists.

While this vision of "diversity success" is optimistic, it is needed to drive existing efforts and to motivate organizations to move forward in the right direction (Baytos, 1995). But at the same time, each organization's diversity challenge is unique. Labor force and other environmental pressures affect agencies differently;

organizations' workforces have become more diverse at different paces and to different degrees; each organization's structure and culture has adapted to the broader societal changes at its own pace and with its own idiosyncrasies. Strategies must therefore be carefully crafted to fit each organizational type in general, and the specific characteristics of each agency and its environment.

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