

## Think Diversity Management Programs Are Enough? Think Again!

Organizations are now starting to implement diversity management programs to address their diverse workforce needs. However, diversity management programs alone are not enough to reap the valuable (and profitable!) benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace. *Diversity management* is more than just policies and procedures. It includes diverse demographics and a climate of inclusion. A *climate of inclusion* is defined as an environment where employees are treated fairly, have equal access to resources, and creates a sense of belongingness as well as uniqueness. Studies have shown that diversity management can promote attractive results like reducing turnover and increasing employee engagement in helping behaviors. But what are the factors that come into play to really leverage these diversity management programs?

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### Fair Climate v. Inclusive Climate

A three-year study in Australia examined the implications of two types of diversity management programs. Li et al. (2019) found that diversity management programs that were identity conscious promoted a greater sense of organizational commitment than diversity management programs that were identity blind.

While most organizations opt for an identity blind program, it only creates a climate of fairness. This means that employee differences are disregarded, and employees are treated fairly. Identity conscious programs acknowledge, embrace, and value diversity in all dimensions. It creates an inclusive climate that builds on fairness. So not only are employees given equal chances and opportunities, but the playing field is leveled as differences are valued.

Diversity management programs alone are not enough, and a climate of inclusion carries powerful potential to impact organizational commitment. In other words, diversity

management programs and a climate of inclusions together can reduce turnover.

### Integration and Approach

Diversity management programs need to be integrated into everyday practices to create a climate of inclusion. An organization's integration and approach to a diversity management program have the potential to demonstrate the perception of an organization's ethical virtues such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Proper integration creates a sense of belongingness by finding opportunities to remove barriers and enhance equal or fair treatment among all employees. It also creates a sense of uniqueness by valuing the expertise of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Together, belongingness and uniqueness foster a climate of inclusion and supports honest dialogue in debating different perspectives, resolving them, and creating new ideas all while expressing ethical virtue.

A recent study by Rabl et al. (2018) found that employees who rated their organization favorably on its integration and approach to diversity are more likely to engage in helping behaviors in their organization. The idea is that when employees view their organization as having ethical values, employees are more likely to embody those values and engage in organizational citizenship behaviors. Additionally, the study also found that employees with a high personal value for diversity were more likely to engage in helping behaviors than those who had a low personal value for diversity. The study all together illustrates the importance of organization and employee values.

In addition, previous literature indicates that diversity management programs have the potential of being perceived as insincere or as the exploitation of a diverse workforce for bottom-line reasons. Employees with high personal value for diversity may have higher standards and expectations for the appropriateness of diversity practices. Because of this, it is imperative that organizations take precautions in implementation approaches. When organizations focus on an appropriate plan for their integration and approach to diversity, it speaks volumes about an organization's ethical values. And when values between an organization and employees align, the magic of a healthy organizational diversity and inclusion culture happens.

### **Leadership Commitment**

When top leadership is committed to the implementation of diversity practices, there will be a ripple effect on the rest of the organization. A study recently conducted in Canada by Ng and Sears (2018) confirmed this idea. It turns out, when employees (or in this case HR managers) perceived their CEO as having positive beliefs

towards diversity practices, the implementation of these diversity practices was more effective. In this study, the researchers examined positive beliefs of CEOs' advocacy for diversity as a strategic initiative to increase performance and innovation. Negative beliefs were defined as beliefs that diversity would lead to inter-group conflict or discrimination. Ng and Sears (2018) also looked at whether a CEO's moral values for social responsibility mattered, and as expected, they did.

The pushback that HR managers may experience as they implement diversity practices has the potential to be emotionally exhausting. Some employees may feel resistant and lash back against organizational change. It is important that HR managers lean on their CEO's positive diversity beliefs as a form of support to effectively implement diversity practices throughout the organization.

### **Addressing Resistance**

In the workplace, resistance is the state of mind reflecting unwillingness or lack of receptiveness to organizational change. Velasco and Sansone (2019), experts in the field of change, diversity and inclusion, and transformational leadership conducted a recent study to investigate different types of resistant behaviors towards diversity and inclusion initiatives. The researchers collected feedback from seven transformational leaders and asked participants to identify effective strategies to address resistance.

Resistant behaviors were classified into passive and active forms. Examples of these passive resistant behaviors are:

- Under resourcing time, personnel and budget
- Leadership failing to prioritize initiatives

- Leadership failing to create structure and mechanisms to success
- Delegating the initiatives to HR department instead of making it everyone's job
- Not showing up to training programs, diversity meetings or strategic planning sessions

Examples of active resistant behaviors are:

- Undermining - questioning the purpose and need for the initiative
- Blocking - openly expressing opposition
- Fault finding – criticizing the cost and the lack of fit with the culture
- Intimidating/threatening - pushback and framing with vehemence
- Manipulating/distorting fact - accusations of hiring and promoting those unqualified
- Appealing to fear - cautioning to not "rock the boat" to avoid making others feel uncomfortable

Three sources were identified as underlying aspects of fear at times of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

1. Change and the unknown (anxiety)
2. The perceived threat of losing privilege and power (perceived injustice)
3. Exclusion

This can be translated into the employee's perception of anticipated loss of job, position, income, power, authority, and economic security. To address these fears, Velasco and Sansone (2019) suggest identifying the underlying type and sources of fear-based behavior. It is recommended to invite open dialogue to discuss concerns and educate others about change and building competency. By addressing resistance

with empathy and facilitating reflection, diversity management programs have a great potential for success.

### **Bringing it All Together**

As organizations attempt to acknowledge a diverse workforce and implement diversity management programs, it is more imperative than ever that organizations redefine their approach to truly maximize the return on investment. Desirable work outcomes like a reduction in turnover and employees engaging in helping behaviors can become a reality through diversity management programs with the following practical suggestions:

- Moving beyond identity blind programs and introducing an inclusive climate
- Integrating inclusive behaviors into everyday practices
- Promoting organizational ethical values
- Ensuring top leadership is committed and showcasing pro-diversity beliefs
- Educating employees by inviting open dialogue to address resistance or fear

Together, with commitment from top leadership for inclusion, integration, and addressing resistance, organizations will be well equipped to move the needle from diversity to inclusion.

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