Diversity management practices: Comparing Cox and Blake's recommendations to current research and practice

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DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: COMPARING COX AND BLAKE'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO CURRENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In 1991, Cox and Blake put forth six advantages from which diverse organizations should benefit. They based these advantages, in part, on organizational practices that were current at the time. In the present paper, we re-visit these advantages and discuss current research as well as organizational 'best practices' with regard to diversity. Through an examination of award winning diversity practices we discuss recommendations for the future of research and practice.

In the early nineties, Cox and Blake (1991) detailed six advantages they believed would benefit diverse organizations. These advantages included cost, resource acquisition, creativity, problem solving, systems flexibility, and marketing. Their article has been highly influential in academic circles as evidenced by its continued citation in numerous academic journal articles (e.g., Basset-Jones, 2005), organizational behavior and (e.g., Johns & Saks, 2005) human resources management textbooks (e.g., Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, Cardy, Dimick & Templer, 2004), and books on diversity management (e.g., Schneider & Barsoux, 2003). However, less clear is the impact of the article on organizational diversity practices. The purpose of this paper is to examine both practical recommendations and current organizational practices as they relate to the advantages put forth by Cox and Blake. To provide additional context for the discussion of organizational practices, we also briefly summarize the empirical evidence accrued in the sixteen years since the publication of Cox and Blake's article. Through examination of current human resource practices as they relate to diversity, it is possible to develop concrete recommendations for the future of both research and practice.

In this paper we first summarize recent research in each of the areas Cox and Blake mention: Cost, resource acquisition, creativity, problem solving, systems flexibility, and marketing. The remainder of the paper centers on organizational best practices on diversity, both those related to Cox and Blake's suggestions and other practices not covered in their article. We supplement the research on best practices with current human resource practices utilized by organizations on DiversityInc's 2006 Top 50 Companies for Diversity (www.diversityinc.com) and past winners of the Catalyst Award – an award given for exceptional initiatives that advance women in the workplace. The Catalyst Award winners also speak to best practices because one criterion for award winners is reliability; the initiative must be replicable by other organizations (www.catalyst.org). Consequently, through analysis of empirical

research on diversity as well as the actions of award winning companies, we are able to make suggestions for best practices related to all six of Cox and Blake's propositions.

Research Evidence

Cost

Cox and Blake reasoned that increasing levels of diversity in organizations would lead to increased costs of turnover and absenteeism. However, organizations with policies in place to accommodate diverse members (e.g., women and visible minorities) should minimize the increased costs associated with absenteeism and turnover. Thus, the cost *advantage* is gained through having lower rates of turnover and absenteeism compared to organizations that lack diversity-friendly management practices. In the same year that Cox and Blake published their article, Jackson et al. (1991) published a highly influential paper describing the deleterious effects of diversity on turnover. In their investigation of 93 top management teams, Jackson et al. (1991), found that demographic heterogeneity in terms of education level, college curriculum and industry experience explained a significant amount of variance in team turnover. Additionally, their results suggested that the team members most likely to leave were those who were most dissimilar in comparison to other members.

The relation between diversity and the stability of group membership has been investigated in a number of other studies with most supporting the assertion that diversity is associated with higher turnover (e.g., Wieserma & Bird, 1993). For example, Alexander, Nuchols, Bloom, and Lee (1995) found heterogeneity of education and tenure to be associated with increased turnover among nurses. Additional research has examined the relationship between diversity of age, sex, and race and outcome variables such as commitment, turnover, and absenteeism. By and large, the results indicate that demographic heterogeneity is associated with costly outcomes, such as turnover (e.g., Sacco & Schmitt, 2005, Ng & Tung, 2005).

Other researchers have suggested that it may not be diversity alone that causes turnover, but the experience of isolation that many designated group members experience (Leonard & Levine, 2006). Leonard and Levine (2006) examined how different proportions of similar versus dissimilar others (Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics) affected rates of turnover. Their results demonstrated that, isolation from coworkers predicted turnover for men and isolation from customers predicted turnover for blacks and Hispanics. Thus, although increased levels of diversity in an organization are associated with increased turnover, it may not be diversity per se, but rather the experience of isolation that influences turnover. The implications of this research suggest that organizational practices that reduce isolation (e.g., employee networks; mentoring) may be effective tactics to retain diverse employees (e.g., Friedman & Holtom, 2002; McMillan-Capehart, 2005; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Resource Acquisition

Cox and Blake (1991) suggest that diverse organizations will be successful attracting and retaining employees from different demographic groups. They argued that recruitment encouraging applications from diverse groups will become a vital activity as the proportion of white males in the workforce decreases. Indeed, the urgency of attracting a heterogeneous employee base is greater now than when Cox and Blake (1991) introduced their ideas. The changing demographic makeup of the workforce noted by Cox and Blake has been compounded by a worker shortage in the U.S. (Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, & McKay, 2000). Thus, attracting applications from underrepresented groups is necessary not only to reap potential benefits of diverse membership, but to satisfy the basic staffing needs of contemporary organizations.

Research does support the idea that those organizations demonstrating their support for diversity by including inclusiveness policy statements in job ads and advertising diverse membership are successful in attracting a diverse workforce (e.g, Avery & McKay, 2006; Zatzick, Elvira, & Cohen, 2003). In general, research on the effects of portraying diversity in recruitment advertisements demonstrates significant effects for traditionally underrepresented organizational participants and null effects for White participants. These results suggest that organizations can target female and minority-group applicants in their recruitment efforts without suffering any negative repercussions in attracting majority-group applicants. In addition, organizations may also consider soliciting minority and female applications proactively through cooperative and outreach efforts with educational institutions, job fairs, and ensuring the fairness of selection systems (Doverspike, et al., 2000).

Creativity

Creative tasks involve formulating new solutions to problems or resolving an issue for which there is no "correct" answer (Jackson, 1992a). Cox and Blake argued that heterogeneity within organizations would promote creativity, but they cited few sources in support of this contention. Since the publication of Cox and Blake's article, research has produced fairly consistent evidence supporting their contention that heterogeneous groups are indeed more creative than homogeneous groups (e.g., Jackson, 1992b). For example, heterogeneous groups generate more feasible and effective ideas, present a wider range of perspectives, generate more alternatives, are more innovative and flexible (e.g., Choi & Thompson, 2005; De Dreu & West, 2001; McLeod, Lobel, & Cox,1996; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993).

It has been suggested that diverse groups are more creative because they have more cognitive resources available to them (Nijstad & Paulus, 2003), in part because diversity facilitates divergent thinking (Milliken, Bartel, & Kurtzberg, 2003; Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams & Neale, 1996). Additionally, the presence of minority member viewpoints adds incrementally to the cognitive resources available to a group, stimulates divergent thought processes, and promotes the generation of perspectives beyond those introduced by minority members (Nemeth, 1992). Finally, because members of diverse teams are less likely to see themselves as an in-group they may be inclined to develop relationships with members outside their team (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989), leading to increased social capital (Hooker, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) and extensive communication networks outside the group (Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001). In turn, these network effects may impact positively on the creativity of diverse workgroups. Thus, organizations that promote dissent within teams and encourage team members to maintain external contacts may be best able to reap the creative benefits associated with diversity.

Problem Solving

Problem solving refers to activities that involve finding solutions to problems for which there are objective standards or agreed-upon answers (Jackson, 1992a; McGrath, 1984). Cox and Blake (1991) suggested that the broader and richer base of experience found in diverse groups, would allow for enhanced problem solving. Improved problem solving is naturally related to performance (e.g., Bass, 1983) and thus, the literature related to both problem solving and performance will be presented in this section.

Although Cox and Blake's argument is intuitively compelling, the empirical evidence pertaining to the effects of diversity on problem solving, decision-making, and performance is mixed at best. In her review of the literature, Jackson (1992b) presents evidence suggesting that groups that are heterogeneous in terms of personal attributes are likely to outperform homogeneous groups on problem-solving tasks

noting, however, that the evidence is modest. Research conducted since Jackson's review fails to provide conclusive evidence; some studies have demonstrated support for the positive relation between diversity and problem solving (e.g., Sawyer, Houlette & Yeagley, 2006), whereas others suggest that diverse membership is negatively related to effectiveness (Kirkman, Tesluk, & Rosen, 2004). Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt (2003) suggested that the nature of the relation depends on the type of diversity, but two recent meta-analyses (Webber & Donahue, 2001; Bowers, Pharmer & Salas, 2000) revealed no relation between diversity and performance, regardless of whether the diversity was functional (task-based) or demographic in nature. In sum, Cox and Blake's (1991) suggestion that a diverse workforce will result in better decisions appears to have been overly optimistic.

Context may be an important factor for understanding the mixed results related to diversity and group performance (Jackson, et al., 2003). In fact, the failure to consider contextual variables may explain the largely null findings in the Webber and Donahue (2001) and Bowers et al. (2000) meta-analyses. The specific contextual variables that have been identified as potential moderators of the relation between diversity and performance are time, group development, the nature of diversity (e.g., racial vs. functional), team type, size, and climate, organizational culture, strategic context, and the type of task (Jackson et al., 2003; Gruenfeld, et al., 1996; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999). Although there is research related to each of these moderators, these studies will not be discussed here. Instead, the relevant research will be discussed in the best practices section, where we will highlight how the contextual factors can be used to facilitate high performance in diverse groups.

System Flexibility

Cox and Blake cited system flexibility as another potential advantage of diversity in organizations. They proposed that diversity would produce greater system flexibility because of the increased cognitive flexibility of bi- or multi-lingual minorities, and the greater tolerance of ambiguity of women. We are unaware of any research that ties these forms of intrapersonal diversity to organizational flexibility. However, researchers have examined another form of intrapersonal diversity - possessing multiple areas of expertise - on team processes and performance. Specifically, Bunderson and Sutcliffe (2002) compared the effect of *intrapersonal* functional diversity (individuals with knowledge of different functional areas -- generalists) versus *dominant* functional diversity (individuals with knowledge of a single area -- experts) on the sharing of information among team members.

Based on data from the management teams of a Fortune 100 company (Bunderson and Sutcliffe, 2002), strong support was found for the positive relation between intrapersonal functional diversity and information sharing. Further, the information sharing was found to partially mediate the positive relation between intrapersonal functional diversity and performance. Not only did the teams of generalists outperform those of functional experts, but information sharing was found to be much higher amongst the generalists than the experts.

These findings suggest that for teams to benefit from diversity it is important to consider whether the members share sufficient knowledge to communicate with one another. Thus, although sparse, there is some evidence to suggest that flexible cognitive structures may be positively related to system flexibility as proposed by Cox and Blake (1991).

Marketing

The final competitive advantage is the marketing argument. Simply put, compared to their homogenous counterparts, diverse organizations should be preferred by consumers. Cox and Blake (1991) suggest the possibility that diverse organizations garner favorable reputations and designated group

members may prefer to buy from these organizations. They also suggest that the positive effects of diversity may extend beyond U.S. corporations as globalization increases. Thus, the benefits to diverse organizations may be evidenced through customer preferences (e.g., consumers will frequent organizations with employees of a similar demographic), stock price fluctuation following diversity-related announcements, and the success of multinational corporations, as well as overall financial performance.

Support for this argument is mixed (e.g., Kochan et al., 2003; Subeliani and Tsogas 2005). For example, Kochan, et al. (2003) suggest that no consistent evidence exists supporting the idea that customers care about the race or gender of their salespeople. There is support, however, for the proposition that customers will support diverse organizations through stock purchases. Organizations have seen positive investor reactions with announcements of quality affirmative action programs (Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995) and inclusion on Fortune's diversity elite list (Pandey, Shanahan, & Hansen, 2005). Further, there is support for the idea that diversity in multinational corporations, especially in the upper echelon of the organization, does result in positive organizational outcomes. For example, Elron (1997) found support for the hypothesis that cultural heterogeneity in top management teams (TMTs) affects subsidiary performance. Finally, there is mixed support for the proposed relationship between diversity and organizational performance, with some research supporting the link up to a certain proportion (e.g., equal representation of males and females; Frink et al., 2003) and other research that suggests that diversity must be managed effectively to reap the benefits (e.g., Richard, McMillan, Chadwick, & Dwyer, 2003). Overall, the mixed evidence in support of this facet of the business case seemingly fits with Litvin, (2006) who notes that it has been difficult to find concrete evidence to support the business case for diversity and that the case needs to change from one where diversity supports organizational goals (i.e., profit) to one where the organization serves the needs of both members and society.

Best Practices

Empirical research provides a foundation from which organizational practices may be developed. However, the reverse is also true; innovative actions undertaken by organizations can also stimulate academic research. In the following section on best practices, we make recommendations based on both of the aforementioned ideas. Where conclusive empirical evidence to support HR practices exists we provide this as an example of 'best practices'. Where empirical evidence is lacking we look to award winning organizations and diversity-related initiatives. To aid in this, we utilized two influential sources – Catalyst, and DiversityInc. The information provided will uncover areas for future research activities to further develop the case for strong diversity-related HR practices. Additionally, Catalyst notes that many of the practices they honoured with the Catalyst Award at the in the late 1980's are now no longer revolutionary – they have been adopted widely as a standard practice (Catalyst, 2005). Thus, we feel confident that some of the initiatives honoured with this award more recently, may one day become widely adopted HR practices.

Organizational Practices

Recruitment. Cox and Blake focused their discussion of resource acquisition on the advantages of being listed as one of the "best companies" for minorities and women, as company reputation can affect applications (Turban & Cable, 2003). A brief examination of company websites suggests that of those companies that have won awards, many list them on their career web pages (e.g., Proctor & Gamble, Coca-Cola, Colgate-Palmolive). However, to date, the research has not specifically determined whether these accolades are related to attracting and hiring diverse employees.

There are specific practices that will encourage women and visible minorities to apply to an organization. In their review of best practices, Thomas and Davis (2006) suggest two activities for attracting a diverse population of applicants. First, companies wishing to attract visible minorities and/or women should attend to recruitment posters and advertisements. Specifically, recruitment posters should have photographs of women and visible minorities and recruitment advertisements should include positive statements about diversity because these statements are noticed and valued by women and visible minorities. Further, these practices do not affect the number of white males in the applicant pool. Thomas and Davis's second recommendation is to continuously examine the recruitment sources and to take advantage of institutions that traditionally have diverse populations. A comparison of these recommendations to the literature review above demonstrates that they are entirely consistent with empirical research.

Examining the recruitment sites of many of the organizations with strong diversity initiatives demonstrates that these recommendations are actively used in practice. Organizations such as Coca-Cola (2007), RBC Financial Group (2007), Verizon Communications/Wireless (2007), and Proctor & Gamble (P&G; 2007) state their commitment to diversity on their recruitment website. Additionally, these organizations also include pictures of diverse others as further demonstration of their commitment to attracting diverse organizational members.

Acquiring diverse employees also involves ensuring that the selection measures do not have adverse impact. Ryan and Tippins (2004) reviewed the research related to hiring practices and adverse impact and found that very few practices have a positive effect on creating a diverse workplace. Their research findings suggest that many common practices used to increase the diversity of an organization (e.g., providing orientation programs to applicants, using banding selection rules, or combining tools that have high and low levels of adverse impact) are not effective and may even increase adverse impact (Sackett & Ellingson, 1997; Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001). Only two strategies appear effective at increasing minority hires. These are targeting recruitment strategies to *qualified* minorities (Murphy, Owen, & Myors, 1995) and using selection measures that focus on contextual performance (e.g., helping behaviours, dedication) in addition to measures of task performance (Hattrup, Rock, & Scalia, 1997). Thus, despite the plethora of techniques to avoid adverse impact, the empirical evidence suggests that very few can be considered best practices for increasing the diversity of an organization. Indeed, organizations seem focused on increasing the number of applicants from designated groups through targeted and focused recruitment efforts and improved selection measures. For example, Merck's recruitment and selection practices incorporate both suggestions (Gilmartin 1999). The organization has sponsored a scholarship for minority group members who wish to pursue a career in biomedical research (by extension, creating a target market from which to recruit). Additionally, Merck re-structured their selection practice by creating a comprehensive set of job-related competencies and focusing all screening and interviewing on these competencies (Gilmartin, 1999). Although the exact competencies on which they focused are unknown, broadening their selection criteria did result in the hiring of a more diverse employee base.

Reducing Turnover

Research suggests that diverse organizational members may leave the organization because of their experiences; minority group members may feel isolated from the larger organization and their co-workers (Leonard & Levine, 2006). In addition, minority group members also experience limited opportunities for growth. For example, Wilson (2000) cites that in Canada's public service, visible minorities represent only 3% of senior-level positions and were granted fewer than 3% of promotions to executive positions. Likely as a result of this problem, many organizations have implemented formal practices that aim to integrate diverse employee through networks and mentoring programs. Although scant, there is some research to suggest that these programs are associated with promotions and career

success (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Ibarra, 1995) and thus, they may also be effective at reducing turnover (e.g., Friedman & Holtom, 2002; McMillan-Capehart, 2005; Payne & Huffman, 2005).

Examining current organizational practices suggests that organizations are utilizing formal networks and mentoring programs and there is some case evidence to indicate that a reduction in turnover may follow the implementation of these programs. For example, Wells Fargo has more than 75 "Team Member Resource Groups" based on employee background/affinity. These groups focus on education, network-building, and increasing knowledge (Wells Fargo, 2007). Similarly Verizon Communication/Wireless has 10 "Employee Resource Groups" focusing on, among other things, mentoring programs, external partnerships, recruitment, and diversity awareness (Verizon Communication/Wireless, 2007). Perhaps one of the most extensive network examples can be found at General Electric (GE). GE was awarded the Catalyst Award in 2004, in part, for their extensive global women's network – GEWN (the organization also has many other networks; Catalyst, 2005). The activities of the network are open to all employees and focus on networking, performance, and work-life balance. GE cites the success of their program as evidenced in their reduced turnover of women at the senior-executive level. Prior to the inception of the initiative turnover was at 14-percent (1996 levels), dropping to 7 percent in 2002 (Catalyst, 2005).   Based on the success of these practices as well as the limited, but positive, empirical research it is recommended that organizations with diverse populations of employees institute formal practices focused on growth opportunities. These practices should be designed to facilitate network building as well as mentoring relationships and it seems likely that they will result in higher retention rates for *all* employees.

Marketing

Despite the mixed research evidence for the marketing argument (e.g., Kochan et al., 2003), organizations do seem to give weight to this facet of the business case, which includes global success, a diverse customer base, and overall financial performance. Indeed, the diversity strategy at P&G includes global action plans, and Colgate-Palmolive indicates on their website that diversity of all kinds will bring advantages in the global marketplace (Colgate-Palmolive, 2007; P&G, 2007).

Focusing on a diverse customer base is also actively communicated as a desirable practice by many organizations. Some organizations espouse the belief that organizational employees should reflect the customer base they serve (e.g., Verizon Communication/Wireless, 2007). As part of their award-winning diversity initiative, Fannie Mae conveyed the commitment to building an employee base that reflects the U.S. population and include diverse others to create competitive advantage (Catalyst, 2005). Wells Fargo is another example of an organization that actively targets diverse markets. For example, Wells Fargo has created a "Diverse Growth Segments Group" whose focus is to create targeted business strategies to garner business from diverse groups. Their efforts to do so have proven successful; Wells Fargo is the first major US financial institution to accept identification from Mexican nationals (the Matricula card) enabling them to open bank accounts. They also use target marketing to increase awareness in diverse communities (Wells Fargo, 2007). Similarly, Toyota utilizes diverse (African-American, Asian, and Hispanic) advertising agencies to target their marketing at specific minority groups (Toyota, 2007).

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that organizations receiving accolades for their diversity initiatives may be superior in terms of financial performance. For example, examining financial performance over a ten-year period suggests that the organizations listed on DiversityInc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity outperformed both the Nasdaq and the Standard & Poor's 500 by 28.2 and 24.8 percent respectively (DiversityInc, 2006). Although it is not possible to isolate the specific financial gains

related to diversity this is consistent with research that points to the positive effect of diversity-related announcements on stock price (e.g., Pandey et al., 1995; Wright et al., 1995).

System flexibility

A key component of diversity includes diversity of abilities, knowledge, and experience (Konrad, 2006). Indeed, Cox and Blake (1991) felt that organizations able to utilize the broad knowledge available to a diverse workforce would gain competitive advantage. In a study examining 195 organizations Konrad and Mangel (2000) found that companies with higher proportions of women were more productive when work-life benefits were in place to support the diverse employee base. This finding supports the idea that for organizations to benefit from diversity, diversity-focused management practices must be implemented. Certainly organizations do recognize that central to exceptional performance is the ability to leverage a broad knowledge base. This is exemplified in the initiatives of two recent Catalyst Award winners - Harley Davidson and Shell Oil Company U.S.

As part of its Leadership and Career Development Program, Harley Davidson created opportunities for all employees to participate in different job functions. For example, higher level employees might participate in a program where they are exposed to cross-functional strategic planning. In addition, all employees are given opportunities to participate in new teams to maximize their cross functional experience and develop their business skills (Catalyst, 2005). Moreover, the company provides continuous education opportunities (e.g., full tuition reimbursement), and encourages employees to develop their abilities and interests by participating in organizational decision-making (Catalyst, 2005).

Shell U.S.' Diversity Progress Enhancement Project is similarly focused on providing employees with the opportunities necessary for success (Catalyst, 2005). Employees tapped as 'high-potential' are given experience across the organization to provide them with the skills and experience necessary to take on managerial positions. The result is an expanded pipeline from which to draw exceptional talent and has increased representation of both women and minorities in management (Catalyst, 2005).

Team Practices Related to Problem Solving and Creativity

Cox and Blake (1991) discussed the potentially advantageous effects of diversity on team performance in terms of problem solving and creativity. Mannix and Neale (2005) provided three empirically-grounded suggestions for improving the functioning of diverse teams: attend to the type of task diverse teams are assigned, find ways to connect team members, and increase the influence of minority team members. These suggestions are consistent with the research discussed in the current paper and each will be applied below.

The nature of the task represents the first contextual variable that should be addressed when considering whether a diverse team is appropriate. Diversity is associated with high performance on creative tasks, but when the task involves convergent processes diversity tends to be detrimental. Research also supports that diverse teams perform well on difficult tasks but are outperformed by homogeneous teams on simpler tasks (Bowers et al., 2000; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999). Thus, when dealing with diverse teams, assign tasks that are difficult and/or unfamiliar.

Connecting group members refers to the processes involved when groups work together. Diverse groups experience greater amounts of conflict than homogeneous groups (Jehn et al., 1999). However, the conflict can take a number of forms, some of which are positive. Substantive, or task-related, conflict is associated with improved performance whereas interpersonal conflict may undermine it (Pelled, 1996).

Thus, organizations are recommended to encourage task-based conflict and minimize interpersonal conflict. Part of the reason task-based conflict is positively associated with performance is due to the sharing of information that occurs between the diverse members (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan, 2004; Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002). Thus, facilitating a connection amongst diverse members of a group is important because it likely helps to motivate them to communicate.

Time is another mechanism that facilitates group performance. In newly formed diverse groups social categories are likely to be formed on the most salient characteristics (Voci, 2006) and interpersonal conflict is likely to plague the members' early interactions. However, with time group members get to know each other and research suggests that demographic characteristics become less salient than underlying attributes. As members become more familiar with each other, the negative effect of readily-detectable diversity on cohesion diminishes (Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998), interpersonal conflict dwindles (Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999) and group members share information more fully (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams and Neale, 1996). Thus, organizations are recommended to create diverse teams if there is sufficient time to allow the team to develop a connection, grow cohesive, thereby facilitating communication and performance.

Group development practices are the final techniques that research supports as an important tool for improving diverse teams' performance. Providing diverse teams with information about their strengths, weaknesses, and progress is associated with high performance, especially if positive feedback can be attributed to the characteristics of the diverse members (Milliken et al., 2003; Watson et al., 1993). It is likely that when the strengths of a team are associated with the diverse members, those members gain influence. This may explain how Mannix and Neale's (2004) suggestion regarding influence can be implemented to improve the performance of a diverse team.

Other Recommended Practices

The search for best practice evidence to support Cox and Blake's (1991) propositions also brought to light many recommendations that they did not cite. For example, other Catalyst recommendations include embedding the diversity strategy in the business strategy, the need for senior commitment, and accountability for diversity results (Catalyst, 2002a; 2002b). The latter is echoed by Thomas and Davis (2006) who note that managerial commitment is crucial and can be achieved through mandatory training and diversity-related rewards among others. Additionally, Konrad (2006) confirms the importance of senior commitment for creating an inclusive social environment. Organizational practices also mirror these recommendations. The CEO of P&G holds himself accountable for diversity and expects that diversity will be integrated into the business strategies of all top organizational leaders (P&G, 2007). Similarly, Merck sets diversity goals for individual managers, divisions, and corporate-wide (Merck, 2007). Catalyst Award winners also have demonstrated top management commitment for their initiatives (e.g., Harley Davidson, Fannie Mae, GE; Catalyst, 2005).

Related to the commitment of top leaders is the recommendation for an accountability system; a process through which organizational members are actually held accountable for reaching diversity-related goals (Catalyst, 2002b; 2002c). Corporate officers at P&G are held accountable for reaching their diversity related goals in their performance ratings and stock options awarded (P&G, 2007). Top management is also held accountable for promoting diversity and retaining and recruiting diverse employees at Verizon Communications/Wireless (2007) and Wells Fargo (2007). Additionally, accountability is a key component on which Catalyst Award winners are evaluated; as with leadership commitment, all winners have management accountability built into their initiatives.

Finally, communication of diversity initiatives is also touted as key; to be effective, diversity strategies must be communicated to employees and to the community at large (Catalyst, 2003a; Thomas, 2004). Indeed, many organizations include diversity related information on their websites (e.g., Merck, 2007; Coca-Cola, 2007), in their annual reports (e.g., Starbucks, 2006), and in their company newsletters and marketing materials (e.g., Wells Fargo, 2007). Further, the community service initiatives of many organizations (e.g., Toyota supports external organizations such as the American Indian College Fund and the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (2007); Merck supports the society of women engineers (2007)) help to communicate that the company values and is interested in the welfare of diverse others, which Konrad (2006) recommends is part of creating an inclusive environment. Again, effective communication of the diversity initiative is integral to the Catalyst Award and is demonstrated by all winners (Catalyst, 2005).

Conclusion

The review of the literature concerning the six advantages proposed by Cox and Blake (1991) suggests that their propositions regarding resource acquisition and creativity were largely correct, but the their position on marketing has received only mixed support, and their suggestions concerning cost, problem solving, and system flexibility require modification. Although research has not confirmed all of Cox and Blake's propositions there are practices relevant to each one. An examination of these diversity management practices suggests that many of the actions implemented by organizations adhere to those recommended by researchers. For example, there are clear prescriptions for how to attract diverse applicants and organizations winning awards for their diversity initiatives are using them. However, there are also areas where organizational practices appear to be operating successfully despite the lack of conclusive research findings. In these instances we have provided case evidence to demonstrate that there may be practices that generate some of the positive outcomes listed by Cox and Blake. These practices deserve the attention of researchers, and may provide us with more conclusive evidence of their value. Despite the common assumption that there is a disconnect between research and practice, leading companies in the area of diversity management appear to follow the research. Therefore, for areas where research remains inconclusive, we suggest using the evidence of success from these award winning companies as a foundation on which to base best practice recommendations.

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