

For an organization to get its arms around the complexity of diversity culture change, it needs to focus on three arenas: (1) individual attitudes and behaviors, (2) managerial skills and practices, and (3) organizational values and policies. The individual attitudes and behaviors component asks employees to do some intrapersonal work that involves identifying their attitudes and beliefs on a wide range of topics such as how they feel about multiple languages spoken in the workplace; attitudes toward whether coworkers can be openly gay in the workplace; conflicting union and management positions on any number of policies; and the hottest diversity topic of the early 2000s—generational differences, or how 20-somethings and 60-somethings vary in their view of the world of work. Change in this arena requires identifying and acknowledging the feelings that come from these differences and the behaviors that result as well. For example, if my attitude toward 20-somethings is that they are shallow and uncommitted, my behavior is likely to be standoffish, uncollaborative, and unresponsive in helping them acculturate to the organization. These behaviors will ultimately affect organizational culture, outreach, and openness to fellow employees as well as services delivered to customers. Training to affect individual attitudes and behaviors has probably yielded the most success in diversity initiatives over the last 25 years. There are many remarkable and impressive examples of change that we have seen. They are a necessary first step but insufficient to change the culture of the organization.

The second arena in which change needs to take place is that of managerial skills and practices. The essence of this change is the recognition that one style of management does not fit all. Managerial practices must be tailored to suit a wide range of employees.

Depending on one's culture, for example, feedback about performance may be delivered very directly, or it may also be given in a much more indirect and subtle way, sometimes with the help of an intermediary or cultural interpreter. Another example of the wide range of practices needed has to do with norms involving meeting participation and giving feedback to bosses. In hierarchical cultures, direct questions or feedback to a boss would be unthinkable, yet it is expected in most parts of the United States. Another cultural difference is how pats on the back or other positive reinforcements are given. Properly acknowledging exemplary performance requires cultural knowledge and sensitivity. In many cultures, public acknowledgment is totally humiliating. In such cases, acknowledging good work, perhaps with a very private and quiet thank you or a note in the employee's file, works wonders, instead of public acknowledgment, which could be mortifying. Managers need to know these differences among their employees because they affect conflict resolution, accountability, team cohesion, commitment, and ultimately work performance.

The last arena of change that is required to successfully leverage diversity involves changes in organizational values and policies. This area is the most complex in which to make progress, and we have seen the least success here. Adjusting the promotional system, for example, or how people are hired and recruited to create a broader talent pool and a more equitable organization, requires complex work that has many steps. For example, how do you begin the process of selecting recruiters who themselves are diverse? And if they are diverse by the internal dimensions, that does not necessarily mean they are open to differences and are themselves objective about others. Sometimes they push for people who look or act like them.

Sensitizing recruiters is only one step in a longer process. How do you then make sure you have broad hiring panels? What are the policies and practices around creating an equitable posting system? Where in the feedback-gathering process do you get feedback from employees about how the system works? How do you hold managers accountable for the diversity changes you are trying to achieve? And once an organization gets the feedback, who is charged with the follow-through of using input and implementing the changes? It's methodical and can be tedious, but it is very important. Organizations that stick with the detailed process can reap just rewards, but these changes don't happen without absolute commitment and follow-through. Our caveat here is this: Be mindful of the law of unintended consequences. When one system is fixed, undoubtedly other glitches crop up elsewhere. One university medical center worked very hard to create relief for employees with young children. They did so, but the burden then fell to those who had no children or whose children were no longer at home, and a new problem resulted. That was the end result, but certainly not the initial intent. Thinking strategically and cleverly about all possible outcomes is absolutely critical.

To make culture change happen, we suggest the following seven-step process. While the steps are presented here in a linear fashion for conceptual purposes, often many steps may be going on at the same time.

#### *STEP 1: GENERATING EXECUTIVE COMMITMENT*

Where the leadership of an organization goes, the rest of the organization will follow. In all our years of doing this work, on only one occasion have we seen a grassroots

effort lead to success. For the most part, executives have to lead the way. It is, however, fallacious to assume that leadership is only at the executive level. Employees at every level of the organization need to demonstrate leadership on this topic if diversity is really to permeate culture. The question is, how do you make the case for it so that everyone buys in?

The business case is about capturing talent, understanding markets, utilizing diverse perspectives for innovation, knowing how and how not to pitch products, and, ultimately, how to generate employee commitment. Executive leaders need to be role models and advocates for this strategic focus. They can do this by using their bully pulpit and talking about it. They can demonstrate support by talking about how important it is in newsletters, online, or by introducing training classes and attending them as well. We had one CEO chair the companywide diversity council, and at every meeting, business unit leaders knew they would be held accountable for reporting their progress. Another division leader wanted to have diversity integrated into the organization through a leadership and team-building lens and had classes to teach this. Because the sites were far-flung, he made a video that was shown at the beginning and end of every session. No one mistook the importance of this work. On the other hand, we have had people tell us that in their organizations, diversity is the last thing mentioned and the first they eliminated when time and money was in short supply. The message about the priority placed on diversity always gets out. This reminds us of what Ralph Waldo Emerson said about 150 years ago: "I can't hear what you're saying because who you are rings so loudly in my ears." People cannot and will not be fooled. Real commitment is transparent . . . so is the lack of it.

## *STEP II: ASSESSMENT*

Experts agree, and experience in organizations validates, that effective diversity management is data driven. Setting off to create a strategy without having accurate data is like starting on a journey into a new territory blindfolded and without a map. The essential task of assessment is twofold. First, assessment helps the organization understand its current state regarding diversity. It provides data to see where there are exclusions that are hindering the organization's effectiveness or ability to achieve its goals and where there might be additional inclusions that could help. These data help the organization identify needs and then set priorities, goals, and objectives for its diversity strategic plan. Second, assessment provides data that serve as a benchmark to measure against once the strategy is implemented.

Four methods can be used to collect assessment data. A review of existing data is often the first step. Employee opinion survey results; customer satisfaction information; demographic data about the workforce, labor force, and marketplace; turnover statistics; and grievances and complaints are examples of the wealth of information that organizations can find in their store of already existing data. Another method is through interviews with leaders, which can provide information about goals and expectations for diversity and perceptions of challenges and obstacles. A third method, convening focus groups with managers, supervisors, and employees, can give the organization critical information about employees' perceptions of treatment and inclusions and exclusions that affect the organization. Finally, survey questionnaires can give statistical information about employees' perceptions of the organization's diversity management. All these sources of data provide key information

needed to clarify the business case for the diversity initiative and to identify areas of focus for plans and changes. A tangential benefit of assessment is that the process also serves to communicate and educate about diversity and involves staff in the process at an early stage.

## *STEP III: DIVERSITY COUNCIL*

Questions are frequently asked about the purpose and use of diversity councils. A culture change process needs some infrastructure in the organization to guide the process, and diversity councils are a common vehicle to use. Their purposes are several. They can be a two-way communication vehicle, getting feedback from employees and giving it to executives as the beginning of dialogue, and in the other direction, explaining diversity and the initiative to employees. They can keep diversity on the radar screen and field answers to the questions of what and why regarding diversity. They can also be a visible structure, signaling that diversity is relevant. The council should be a body that reflects the whole organization. In other words, when people see diversity council members, at least one person on the council should reflect them by work unit, location, gender, age, race, and other diversity dimensions.

The primary task of most councils is to define obstacles and opportunities for increasing organizational effectiveness, then make recommendations that can be considered at the highest levels of the organization and given to the appropriate structures to be acted on. They also monitor change process and evaluate results. Diversity councils rarely do the long-term change work themselves because council members all have full-time jobs.

For the council to function effectively, in our experience, it needs 2 days of training

prior to its initial work. Day 1 focuses on diversity content training so members can more fully understand themselves, their own reactions to differences, what diversity is and how it affects the organization. Day 2 is a planning day when the council sets up its own norms and determines how to get data so it can do its work. It defines its mission and begins the discussion of goal setting and measures of success. To help them be effective after the initial session, there needs to be consistency in meeting times with meetings no longer than a month apart. Ongoing training and team development is a critical factor in effective councils. The best chance for success takes place when there is adequate and ongoing training, work on relevant issues, adherence to agreed-upon norms, and accountability by all involved.

#### *STEP IV: SYSTEMS CHANGES*

For diversity management to be effective, more than awareness and sensitivity is required. Organizational systems and operational practices need to be aligned with diversity goals. Systems such as recruitment, hiring, promotion/career development, and compensation/benefits, which affect how the organization treats employees and uses diversity, need to be examined and often modified. Organizations sometimes find they need to conduct pay equity reviews, adjust scheduling and benefits, and revamp promotional processes to ensure fairness and equal access. Setting diversity performance objectives for staff, using diverse hiring panels, and requiring managers to look at a diverse slate of candidates before making a hiring decision are other examples of systems changes that are often made. Others include the establishment of affinity groups or employee associations and mentoring processes,

making promotional criteria and processes more transparent, and expanding outreach efforts in recruiting. All of these changes are aimed at enhancing the organization's ability to recruit and retain top talent and leverage the differences they bring.

#### *STEP V: TRAINING*

Training frequently gets a bum rap for not changing organizations. It is not designed to do that. Training can create awareness and help people develop knowledge and skills, and the awareness, knowledge, and skills gained through training can ultimately result in behavior change throughout the organization at individual and team levels. However, it cannot carry the weight of culture change.

The primary initial content areas for diversity training start with what it is and why it matters.

Each organization needs its own definition of diversity and business case. The other two essential components of basic training center on understanding culture at organizational, team, national, and personal levels and how it influences interactions and behavior on the job, and also understanding and managing the phenomena of stereotypes, prejudice, and assumptions. Human beings have always engaged in this prejudgment and labeling process; however, there are ways to manage our immediate unconscious assumptions better, and helping employees learn those ways is part of the content. Beyond basic diversity training, there can also be management training on topics such as building diverse teams, giving performance reviews effectively across different cultures, and handling anger and conflict successfully in diverse groups. Regardless of what content one focuses on, our suggestion is to integrate

diversity into already existing training. For example, weaving it into the current supervisory training is an effective way to leverage diversity. That way it becomes integrated more effectively into all training, appears more relevant and application oriented, and faces less resistance when it does not stand alone. In addition, measurement and accountability are essential. What is expected from people as a result of the training effort? Tying the application to daily work gets people's attention, commands respect, and leads to results.

#### **STEP VI: MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION**

One of our best teachers, Dr. John E. Jones, used to say, "What gets measured gets done, and what gets rewarded gets repeated." Measuring the effects of diversity change efforts and evaluating the results is critical. Measurement gives credibility by providing data that show results, and it also uncovers information that can serve as feedback for continual improvement.

Two kinds of questions need to be answered. The first has to do with the process, and the second has to do with results. Both process and results need to be monitored to gain the most from evaluation. Process measures assess how we did, what went well, what didn't, and why. For example, how many employees participated in the mentoring program, and what was their feedback on the experience? Results measure what difference it made for the organization.

For example, what was the percentage of decrease in turnover, and how much did that save the organization?

Measurement is inherently a comparative process, so it needs to be planned from the beginning. Specific criteria and measures need to be set at the beginning of the plan—for example, an increase in the

demographic representation of underrepresented groups, an increase in sales in particular markets, a decrease in turnover, or a reduction of disparity between groups in employee satisfaction results. Then, data relative to criteria are collected as the plan is implemented. Assessment data gathered at the beginning can serve as a baseline to measure against, and both hard and soft measures can be used. Hard measures such as sales, productivity, turnover, customer retention, and demographic representation statistics are critical. However, soft measures such as customer and employee survey scores and hotline calls also give valuable information about the impact and results of diversity strategy implementation.

#### **STEP VII: INTEGRATION**

An organization knows it is successful at its change process when it no longer has to make diversity a stand-alone topic because it has become part of all operations. Creating a feedback loop so that procedures continue to be improved and refined and new areas for inclusion are pinpointed is key. This continuous loop keeps both the systems and the outcomes viable and significant while also ensuring both relevance and results. Managing diversity is a continually evolving process aimed at ongoing improvement for the success of the organization.

#### **◆ Discussion Questions**

1. How is diversity a strategic business imperative for organizations?
2. What are the reasons for using a broad and inclusive definition of diversity in creating a strategy for leveraging it?