

Chapter 6

Leveraging Diversity for Competitive Advantage

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ABSTRACT

Competitive advantage is attained through talent development and management. Talented employees seek career advancement, change, and success. Organization leaders must integrate organization and career development into their strategic plans and can no longer exclude diverse individuals with talent nor diversity of thought. Key themes are revealed in this chapter to assist with elimination of institutional barriers that limit the success of diverse employees.

INTRODUCTION

There are many challenges faced by organization leaders as they attempt to leverage diversity for competitive advantage within their organizations. Yet, they must overcome the challenges to successfully determine the impact of diversity on organization and career development. This chapter provides a nascent process to address some of the challenges not limited to those outlined below:

- The challenge of getting organization leaders to acknowledge the need for a clear definition of diversity that aligns with the federal government's definition.
- The challenge of establishing a culture of diversity excellence within organizations led by executive leadership.
- The challenge of establishing diversity change initiatives that benefit all employees as they strive for career advancement.
- The challenge of establishing appropriate diversity training plans that are immersed throughout the organization.
- The challenge of acknowledging the difference between career development and career management.

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- The challenge of integrating career development evaluation into the current performance evaluation systems of organizations.
- The challenge of embracing change.

Organization leaders must welcome and support change if they want to see their organizations succeed at executing diversity efforts. The clear problem in all of the challenges above is a lack of executive leadership support for diversity change initiatives. Diversity change must begin at the top of organizations for it to be effective. This does not mean that all executive leaders must be diverse especially since all diverse individuals are not the same nor do they have the same values. One assumption that executive leaders often make is that if they promote someone into a diversity leadership position who looks like some of the diverse individuals in the organization, the problem will be solved. This has not proven to be a viable solution as evidenced by the need for this book to highlight continued diversity issues within organizations.

Often the individuals who are promoted to leadership positions do not have the power to affect change for others who are in similar positions that they were able to leave. Many of them simply may not care about others because they have achieved their career goal and do not want to lose their precarious position. They are at the mercy of the individual(s) who promoted them; thus, their allegiance is to those individuals and the group from which they emerged. This chapter is not advocating group think by any means, but is providing reasoning of why it is not enough to promote the single, diverse employee to represent the whole group of other diverse employees. One is not enough.

Organization leaders must establish a culture that defines diversity in alignment with the federal government standard and not go beyond that definition when it comes to determining what diversity is within their organization. Continued confusion regarding diversity limits the organization's potential for achieving competitive advantage through their diverse employees. Limiting the career aspirations of diverse employees also limits the organization development goals of the organization since the employees are needed to achieve organization development initiatives.

Without effective organization development, organizations will not be able to overcome the challenge of establishing a culture of diversity excellence. Therefore, executive leaders must lead the diversity efforts for their organization by promoting individuals who are broadly educated to provide effective diversity leadership for all of its employees and not serve as a figure head without any formal power. A culture of diversity excellence is exhibited by individuals who have diversity, emotional, intellectual, and cultural intelligences and competencies to treat all employees fairly and honorably. Executive leaders must model the ethical characteristics that support the rejection of marginalized treatment for all diverse employees.

If they are not seen to be sincerely embracing diverse employees at all levels of the organization, they cannot expect that those they lead would do the same. Leaders have followers who watch their attitudes and actions and try to emulate them because they want to be like their leaders. Since this has been shown to be true, executive leaders must frankly encourage their followers to embrace diversity and hold them accountable for their attitude and actions.

Executive leaders must become accountable for establishing diversity change initiatives that benefit all employees as they strive for career advancement. Many organizations speak about and present diversity change initiatives and nothing else is ever done to ensure that the initiatives achieve its goals and benefits all employees in their career advancement goals. The subconscious nature of institutional racism subverts their efforts before they are ever properly implemented. Employees are placed in the out group before they ever have a chance to participate in diversity change initiatives. Institutional rac-

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