Chapter 12

Applying Diversity–Intelligent Organizational Strategies for Competitive Advantage

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ABSTRACT

Competitive advantage is attained through talent development and leadership. Talented employees seek career advancement, change, and success. Organization leaders must integrate all employees into their strategic plans and can no longer exclude talented, diverse individuals. Key diversity improvement themes are revealed in this chapter to help leaders focus on areas within the organization to apply diversity intelligent strategies and eliminate institutional barriers that limit the success of diverse employees. Sustaining competitive advantage requires dedicated efforts of executive leaders in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Extensive research and practical efforts have been dedicated to integrating diversity into organizations. These efforts using diversity management processes and systems within organizations have not been successful (Kalev, Dobbins, & Kelly, 2006). Diversity goals have been measured within teams and individually, but there remains a need for continued focus to achieve organizational diversity goals. It has been suggested that leaders need to develop diversity competencies (i.e. cultural, diversity, sensitivity, etc…) to motivate employees to accept diverse employees within the organization; however, diversity competence development has not previously been

promoted using diversity intelligence (DQ). Diversity competencies are needed by all employees to promote diversity initiatives that the organization leadership supports; however, the competencies must first be displayed by the executive leadership of the organization. Executive leaders need DQ to champion diversity initiatives and efforts that they espouse to support.

Kaye (1997) suggested that a diverse workforce poses both challenges and opportunities for an organization. The main organizational challenge is to develop the knowledge and flexibility of its diverse workforce to each employee's highest potential. She recommended that organization leaders ask the following questions to evaluate diversity development:

1. Are we satisfied with the state of the art of this organization's development opportunities for special needs groups?
2. How will each career development stage make our organization more responsive to diversity needs?
3. Are we using the skill identification information developed at the Profiling Stage, to give us a better picture of needs of any underrepresented groups?
4. Are the goals for developing diversity, set at the Targeting Stage, realistic?
5. Is the organization doing all it can to support these goals? (p. 227)

Organization leaders seek to create workplaces where employees from all backgrounds fully utilize their skills (Hughes, 2018c) and feel personally comfortable (Jackson & Joshi, 2001). Pfeffer (1992) noted that "organizations have career systems in place that tend to reward and encourage activities and skills more generously than others…Therefore, those who rise to positions of influence and who benefit from this career system have a particular set of skills and have engaged in a particular set of activities – those favored by the system" (p. 318). Therefore, upon entry into any organizational system, women and diverse individuals must build relationships and develop an understanding of the culture and career system they have entered (Banks, 2006a, 2006b). Pfeffer (1992) also stated that "It is critical that one be able to diagnose the relative power of various participants and comprehend the patterns of interdependence. One needs to know and understand not only the game, but also the players" (p. 49) and that "[d]eveloping and exercising power requires having both will and skill. It is the will that often seems to be missing" (p. 338). He also noted that "there is a greater sin than making mistakes or influencing others – the sin of doing nothing, of being passive in the face of great challenges and opportunities, and even great problems" (1992, p. 300). Executive leaders must display the will to influence greater diversity efforts within organizations. They cannot be passive observers of failed diversity efforts within organizations and career advancement

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