Chapter 92
Veterans Should Be Included Too:
Strategies for Promoting Diversity of Veterans in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The transitioning of veterans from the military world to the civilian world and by extension the civilian workforce is a critical career transition. Despite their motivation and resilience, veterans still encounter a multiplicity of challenges when transitioning to the civilian workforce, which quite often has a rippling impact on their attainment of employment, job retention, and career development within the civilian sector. An added layer to the transitional challenge for veterans is organizational resistance to promote diversity and inclusion policies and practices, specifically regarding veterans. On this premise, this chapter aims to: 1) Discuss the transitional challenges of veterans to the civilian workforce and 2) Provide implementation strategies at an organizational level to promote diversity and inclusion, specifically regarding veterans.

INTRODUCTION

The management of diversity within the business environment is crucial to success of an organization (Byrd, 2014; Byrd & Scott, 2018; Byrd & Hughes, 2018; Johnson, 2008; Thomas, 2005). If properly managed, diversity can be extremely advantageous Davis et al., 2016; Rice, 1994; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). As posit by Foster and Harris (2005), diversity can create a competitive advantage from an organizational perspective by helping to recruit and retain the best employees. Diversity has increased creativity at an organizational level (Abaker, Al-Titi, & Al-Nasr 2019), and enhanced decision-making

(Foster & Harris, 2005). However, if not properly managed, diversity can be the underpinning for conflict, which has a rippling negative impact on efficiency, quality of work innovation and increased employee turnover (Abaker, Al-Titi, & Al-Nasr 2019).

Within recent years, there has been much emphasis by leaders as it relates to the diversification of organizations. According to Liggans, Attoh, Gong, Chase, Clark, &. Russell (2018) "as diversity within organizations continues to rise, leaders are increasingly focused on integrating the diverse perspectives of various demographic groups into the organization and empowering all individuals" (p.140). Hence, organizations focal point should not be solely diversity but inclusion of all employees. While there is a vast amount of literature as it relates to diversity, organizational diversity, diversity management, related policies and procedures, the concept of organizational inclusion is unparalleled and has not been thoroughly explored (Brimhall et al., 2017; Nair & Vohra, 2015;Liggans, Attoh, Gong, Chase, Clark, &. Russell, 2018). Scholars have described the practice of inclusion in comparison to diversity in differing ways. For example, Ferdman (2014) described inclusion as "creating and embedding organizational, leadership, and interpersonal practices that result in a sense of safety, full belonging, participation, and voice across the range of diversity dimensions, without requiring assimilation or loss of valued identities" (p. 44); and Roberson (2006) described inclusion as the removal of obstacles that prevent employees from contributing. In more recent years, Shore et al., (2011) defined inclusion as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (p. 1265). Despite the varying versions of defining inclusion, the common theme that emerged regarding inclusion is the concept of employees being recognized as equals by their organization and opportunities exist that allows them to positively contribute, be fully engaged, and fitting in. Inclusion must occur despite whatever difference may exist at an individual level. On this premise, it is paramount for organizations to have policies, practices, resources, and an organizational culture that promotes inclusion. A misconception is that once organization employees appears to represent diverse demographic grouping, the organization is one that promotes diversity and inclusion. An organization can promote diversity, but the practice of diversity and inclusion is not authentic if there are no interventions or initiatives that support inclusion.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Veterans Affairs Fast Facts (2018) outlined that there are approximately 18.2 million veterans in the United States. According to the Census Bureau, these veterans make up approximately 7.6% of the population in the United States. The veteran employee has often been classified as being equipped with a unique skill set, vast amount of training, experiences, impeccable work ethics, and characteristics (Minnis, 2017) all of which are beneficial to an organization. However, upon entering the civilian workforce, unlike the civilian employee, veterans are equipped with an added layer of challenges regarding social acclimation and acceptability within the "civilian world". Stereotypes as it relates to their personal, psychological, and in some instance, physical abilities, and perceived low educational level often contributes to that division within the civilian workforce. Considering this, veterans are classified as a diverse group that warrants organization not only to put forward diversification initiatives but also inclusion intervention. They are a protected class group within the United States Federal Protection guidelines (American with Disabilities Act, (1990); Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (1994); Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Act (1974); Age Discrimina-

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