

5.4.7: Recommendations for Managing Diversity

What can organizations do to ensure applicants, employees, and customers from all backgrounds are valued?

Organizations that are committed to equality and inclusion must take steps to combat the examples of discrimination and harassment that have been covered in this chapter. And they must take steps to make diversity a goal in the pre-employment stages as well as in the post-employment stages. Anyone with managerial or supervisory responsibilities should pay careful attention to hiring and performance-rewarding practices, and make sure to rely on relevant information for making decisions and ignore race-based stereotypes. The following are examples of what leaders and organizations can do make sure employees feel valued.

Interview Selection Process

To ensure fairness for all applicants, organizations should use **highly structured interviews** during the selection process to avoid bias based on race or gender.¹⁴⁵ Highly structured interviews consists of the following 15 characteristics: “(1) job analysis, (2) same questions, (3) limited prompting, (4) better questions, (5) longer interviews, (6) control of ancillary information, (7) limited questions from candidates, (8) multiple rating scales, (9) anchored rating scales, (10) detailed notes, (11) multiple interviewers, (12) consistent interviewers, (13) no discussion between interviews, (14) training, and (15) statistical prediction.”¹⁴⁶ Similarity bias can occur when interviewers prefer interviewees with whom they share similar traits. Organizations can mitigate this challenge if all 15 characteristics of a structured interview are used consistently with each job applicant.

Diversified Mentoring Relationships

Thanks to the rapid growth of international travel and globalization, managers are often called upon to manage a workforce that is increasingly diverse. Research has shown that racially and ethnically diverse firms have better financial performance than more homogeneous firms, because, as mentioned, employees from different backgrounds and with different experiences can give the firm a competitive advantage in various ways. It is necessary, however, that managers and those in positions of power are adequately equipped to manage diverse workforces in ways that are beneficial to all. **Diversified mentoring relationships** are relationships in which the mentor and the mentee differ in terms of their status within the company and within a larger society. The differences could be in terms of race, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, or other status. Research has found that these types of relationships are mutually beneficial and that the mentor and the mentee both have positive outcomes in terms of knowledge, empathy, and skills related to interactions with people from different power groups.¹⁴⁷

managerial leadership

Diversity Training Programs

As the workforce becomes increasingly more diverse, managers will face a major challenge in understanding how to manage diversity. One of many decisions to be made is whether an organization should offer diversity training and, if so, what topics and issues should be addressed based on the organizational goals.

There has been a debate over the effectiveness of corporate diversity training since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped prompt corporate diversity training with the organizational goal of simply being compliant with the law. Prior research shows that it can be effective, ineffective, or even detrimental for employees, but as diversity training has evolved through the years, it has become an important factor in helping employers manage diversity.

In the 1980s through the late 1990s, diversity training evolved from focusing solely on compliance to addressing the needs of women and minorities as they entered the workforce at a faster rate. Unfortunately, this type of training was perceived by Whites and men as singling them out as the problem; sometimes such training was even formatted as “confession” sessions for White employees to express their complicity in institutional racism. Not unexpectedly, this type of training would often backfire and would further separate employees from each other, the exact opposite of its intention.

Recently, diversity training has evolved to focus on (1) building cultural competencies regarding fellow employees, (2) valuing differences, and (3) learning how diversity helps make better business decisions. This perspective toward diversity training is more effective than simply focusing on causes of a lack of diversity and the historical roots of discrimination. Understanding how to comply with the law is still important, but training has a greater effect when the other factors are also included.

A recent study investigated various diversity-training methods, including having participants engage in activities on perspective taking and goal setting. For perspective-taking activities, participants were asked to write a few sentences about the challenges they believed minority group members might experience. Goal-setting activities involved writing specific and measurable goals related to workplace diversity such as crafting future policies or engaging in future behaviors. Researchers found that when these activities were used as a diversity-training method, pro-diversity attitudes and behavioral intentions persisted months later.

Issues regarding employee sexual orientation have also been introduced into corporate diversity training in recent years. Because employees' religious beliefs are protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, employers should be sensitive to balancing the rights of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees and employees' religious rights. Attempting to protect the rights of one group and not be perceived to disrespect another is a difficult situation for managers. In order to mitigate any backlash from some employees, employers should seek feedback from all groups to learn the best ways to accommodate them, and should assess the organizational climate. Additionally, managers should explain how diversity based on sexual orientation aligns with the company's strategic objectives and explain the company's legal position with supportive reasoning. Lastly, based on their organizational climate and how it reshapes itself over time, some companies may wish to address diversity training on sexual orientation in a voluntary training separate from other diversity issues.

Sources: Young, Cheri A., Badiah Haffeejee, and David L. Corsun. "Developing Cultural Intelligence and Empathy Through Diversified Mentoring Relationships." *Journal of Management Education* (2017): 1052562917710687; Bezrukova, K., Jehn, K.A., & Spell, C.S. (2012). Reviewing diversity training: Where we have been and where we should go. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 11 (2): 207-227; Anand, R., & Winters, M. (2008). A retrospective view of corporate diversity training from 1964 to the present. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 7 (3): 356-372; Lindsey, A., King, E., Membere, A., & Cheung, H.K. (July 28, 2017). Two types of diversity training that really work. *Harvard Business Review*.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you believe diversity training is resisted by some employees?
2. Do you believe there will always be a need for workplace diversity training?
3. How would you determine what types of diversity training are needed at your company?

Visible Leadership

Another key to ensure that employees are treated fairly is utilizing appropriate leadership strategies.¹⁴⁸ Leadership must sincerely value variety of opinions, and organizational culture must encourage openness and make workers feel valued. Organizations must also have a well-articulated and widely understood mission and a relatively egalitarian, nonbureaucratic structure. Having such a work environment will ensure that the attitudes and values of employees are aligned with those of the organization. In this way, culture serves as a control mechanism for shaping behaviors.

Strategies for Employees

Individuals can increase positive employment outcomes by obtaining high levels of education because for all groups education is a predictor of employment and increased earnings. Individuals can also seek employment in larger firms, which are more likely to have formal hiring programs and specific diversity provisions in place. Individuals of any race or ethnic background can also take steps to eliminate discrimination by being aware of their own personal stereotypes or biases and taking steps to challenge and address them.

concept check

- How can managers ensure fairness in the interviewing and selection process regarding diversity?
- What is the role of leadership regarding diversity?

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