Is Diversity Respected in the Workplace?

COML 506

Gonzaga University

Ted Dahlstrom

COML 506

Professor Caputo

November 18, 2017

Abstract

Workplace diversity is a popular topic. Many companies have initiatives and policies designed to increase diversity among their employees. Workplace diversity includes employees of different race, gender, geographic origin, and sexual orientation, but also should include diversity of background and experience. Many companies support and seek out a diverse workforce, but workplace diversity initiatives often fail because the policy is misunderstood, created for the wrong reasons, or not supported by top management. Measuring the effectiveness of a workplace diversity initiative is important but difficult to achieve. Unforeseen negative impacts of such initiatives also occur, but are outweighed by the positive impact of a diverse workforce. In the race for talent, employees are increasingly choosing to work for companies that share their values, so it is important for a company's workforce to be diverse and aligned with the values of its employees.

Is Diversity Respected in the Workplace?

Workplace diversity is a popular topic. Many companies have initiatives and policies designed to increase diversity among their employees. The federal government defines workforce diversity as: "a collection of individual attributes that together help [federal] agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively" (OPM, 2016). Companies with workplace diversity initiatives generally seek a diverse mix of employees of different race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and other non-traditional categories, including diversity of thought (Shackelford, 2003).

Diversity of thought is an important part of workplace diversity. Companies that bring together employees with different backgrounds and experiences often make better strategic decisions because groupthink is reduced or eliminated (Hernandez, 2014). Many companies support and seek out a diverse workforce, but workplace diversity initiatives often fail because the policy is misunderstood, created for the wrong reasons, or not supported by top management (Marques, 2007). There are also many unforeseen disadvantages to workplace diversity initiatives, including an impact on company share price (Cook & Glass, 2011). While many companies seek a diverse workforce, the effectiveness of workplace diversity initiatives can be hard to measure. This paper seeks to explore the importance of workplace diversity initiatives and whether they are respected in the modern workplace.

Literature Review

Diversity of Thought in the Workplace

Tacha (2011) believes that diversity includes more than race and gender. Diversity in America includes ethnic backgrounds, languages, religion, political views, professional experiences, and geographic areas. The importance of diversity in the judiciary has a long history dating back to the Constitutional Convention. The framers of our nation were a diverse group of men that believed in individual sovereignty and equal justice under the law (Tacha, 2011). In the judiciary, diversity is about bringing together collective knowledge, born from an array of experiences, in order to ensure its decisions are respected and followed. Female judges have different experience than male judges, of course, but geographical diversity is also important. Someone from New York City has a different worldview than someone from rural Oklahoma. Diversity of thought and opinion is also of equal importance to an independent judiciary (Tacha, 2011). As a former federal judge, Tacha believes that a diverse judiciary is a respected and independent one that will safeguard our country.

Diversity is considered a business and social imperative in most health care institutions, but few leaders consider the benefits of improving the quality of strategic decisions by seeking cognitive diversity (Hernandez, 2014). Recruiting very broadly, including seeking employees with diverse generational, gender, place of origin, and socioeconomic backgrounds, can result in a more diverse workforce than recruiting those with different external appearances but the same world view as existing employees (Hernandez, 2014). Cognitive diversity seeks out and takes

into account the backgrounds and experiences of employees. Leaders who want to

bring the broadest and deepest perspectives to their team will recruit beyond the

standard definitions of diversity (Hernandez, 2014).

If a leader seeks out diverse perspectives when recruiting new employees,

they can increase the likelihood of hiring people who are willing to challenge their

biases (Hernandez, 2014). Workplaces must do more to address diversity than

simply recruiting people based on external appearances. A truly diverse workplace

respects the importance of diversity of thought.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Workplace Diversity Initiatives

Companies often use the word "diversity" in their mission statements and

include content on the importance of workplace diversity on their corporate web

sites. Some even hire Chief Diversity Officers. But many organizations implement

workplace diversity programs for the wrong reasons (Marques, 2007). There are

four main reasons why workplace diversity programs fail at some organizations: 1.

They want to maintain a workforce that reflects the customer base so customers feel

more at ease, which means diversity is implemented only for appearances' sake; 2.

They implement diversity initiatives from a "we-are-one" perspective, which creates

only surface value that displays physical diversity but discourages perceptional

diversity; 3. They implement diversity initiatives because it is trendy but do not

involve top management and do not provide proper guidance, which quickly

renders the initiative ineffective; and 4. They diversify geographically, hiring

employees based on locally perceived needs (e.g. black employees in minority-

majority regions, LGBT employees in progressive regions, and older workers in

more conservative regions) (Marques, 2007). Workplace diversity is about getting employees to work better together and needs the participation of everyone, including top management, in order to be implemented effectively.

In recent years corporate managers have faced growing pressures to craft diversity-friendly labor policies and work environments in order to better compete for skilled labor. These pressures have come from several constituencies, including clients and customers, industry consultants, human resource managers, employees and the public at large (Cook & Glass, 2011). Studies have shown many benefits of diversity, including strengthened recruitment capacities, increased creativity and innovation among decision-makers, and reduced workplace conflicts. As such, many companies have sought not only to institute employment policies and practices consistent with these goals but to advertise these efforts as well (Cook & Glass, 2011).

However, investors are more concerned with short-term returns on share price rather than long-term strategic planning, which includes workplace diversity programs. As such, corporate executives must balance their long-term goal of increasing diversity against the short-term requirement of increasing share price (Cook & Glass, 2011). To mitigate the short-term impact on company value after implementing diversity programs, Cook and Glass (2011) advise company executives to be more aggressive in educating shareholders about the positive impacts of diversity on productivity and profitability and incorporate diversity in specific ways in strategic growth plans. Compiling and making this evidence available to shareholders may raise awareness about the possible economic benefits

from diversity and would likely positively impact shareholders' value of these efforts.

Measuring Success of Workplace Diversity Initiatives

De Meuse and Hostager (2001) developed the Reaction-to-Diversity (RTD) Inventory to construct an instrument that provides human resources (HR) professionals with "an objective, quantifiable assessment of individual attitudes and perceptions of diversity." De Meuse and Hostager (2001) conducted three separate studies over three years to: 1. Identify dimensions of diversity reactions; 2. Develop an instrument to measure the dimensions; and 3. Administer the RTD inventory. They designed the RTD instrument to find out if the time and money spent on diversity programs have a positive effect on employee attitudes toward diversity and whether diversity training has any real impact on employee behavior. They sought to understand whether employees actually gained a heightened understanding, sensitivity, or acceptance of individual differences (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001).

Previous scholarly studies of workplace diversity suggest a broad range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses among employees. For example, some individuals react in negative ways to diversity by (a) fearing those who are different, (b) expressing prejudicial attitudes, (c) believing that diversity initiatives are inherently unfair, (d) refusing to cooperate with members of a particular group, or (e) viewing diversity as a threat to career advancement and to the performance and profitability of the company (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001).

In contrast, other individuals respond in positive ways by (a) enthusiastically embracing individual differences, (b) believing that diversity is a source of learning and creativity, (c) eagerly interacting with people of diverse backgrounds, or (d) viewing diversity as an opportunity for personal growth and improved organizational profitability (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). After conducting their scientific study and developing the RTD Inventory, De Meuse and Hostager (2001) concluded that generalized workplace diversity perceptions and attitudes can be measured and assessed in a valid manner.

Conclusion

Diversity is respected in the workplace now more than ever. Companies have many reasons for implementing workplace diversity initiatives, but it is important for senior management to understand the reasoning behind creating such a policy and fully support its implementation. Some workplace diversity initiatives fail to resonate among employees and do not result in measurable improvement in performance, profitability, or productivity. A successful workplace diversity program will have the support of employees and senior management and will include an emphasis on diversity of experience and background, not just external factors such as race and gender. More and more employees are seeking out companies that are at the forefront of social initiatives, including workplace diversity. They believe it is important for a company to share the same values as its employees. As the race for talent intensifies, it is important for a company to create a welcoming, diverse workplace in order to create loyalty among its employees and successfully compete in the marketplace.

References

Cook, A. & Glass, C. (2011). Does diversity damage corporate value? measuring stock price reaction to a diversity award. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34, 2173-2191.

De Meuse, K. & Hostager, T. (2001). Developing an instrument for measuring attitudes toward and perceptions of workplace diversity: an initial report. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 12, 33-51.

Hernandez, J. S. (2014). Diversity of thought: a competitive advantage. *Physician Executive*, 40, 90-92.

Marques, J. (2007). Implementing workplace diversity and values: what it means, what it brings. *Performance Improvement*, 46, 5-7.

Shackelford, W. G. (2003). The changing definition of workplace diversity. *Black Collegian*, 33, 53-58.

Tacha, D. (2011). Diversity in the judiciary: a conversation with Deanell Tacha. *The University of Kansas Law Review*, 59, 1037-1043.

United States Office of Personnel Management. (2016). *Governmentwide inclusive diversity strategic plan.* Retrieved from http://www.opm.gov