

Diversity in the Workplace: Benefits, Challenges and Solutions

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Workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in an organization. That sounds simple, but diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnic group, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background and more.

Diversity not only involves how people perceive themselves, but how they perceive others. Those perceptions affect their interactions. For a wide assortment of employees to function effectively as an organization, human resource professionals need to deal effectively with issues such as communication, adaptability and change. Diversity will increase significantly in the coming years. Successful organizations recognize the need for immediate action and are ready and willing to spend resources on managing diversity in the workplace now.

Benefits of Workplace Diversity

An organization's success and competitiveness depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize the benefits. When organizations actively assess their handling of workplace diversity issues, develop and implement diversity plans, multiple benefits are reported such as:

Increased adaptability: Organizations employing a diverse workforce can supply a greater variety of solutions to problems in service, sourcing, and allocation of resources. Employees from diverse backgrounds bring individual talents and experiences in suggesting ideas that are flexible in adapting to fluctuating markets and customer demands.

Broader service range: A diverse collection of skills and experiences (e.g. languages, cultural understanding) allows a company to provide service to customers on a global basis.

Variety of viewpoints: A diverse workforce that feels comfortable communicating varying points of view provides a larger pool of ideas and experiences. The organization can draw from that pool to meet business strategy needs and the needs of customers more effectively.

More effective execution: Companies that encourage diversity in the workplace inspire all of their employees to perform to their highest ability. Company-wide strategies can then be executed; resulting in higher productivity, profit, and return on investment.

Challenges of Diversity in the Workplace

Taking full advantage of the benefits of diversity in the workplace is not without its challenges. Some of those challenges are:

Communication - Perceptual, cultural and language barriers need to be overcome for diversity programs to succeed. Ineffective communication of key objectives results in confusion, lack of teamwork, and low morale.

Resistance to change - There are always employees who will refuse to accept the fact that the social and cultural makeup of their workplace is changing. The "we've always done it this way" mentality silences new ideas and inhibits progress.

Implementation of diversity in the workplace policies - This can be the overriding challenge to all diversity advocates. Armed with the results of employee assessments and research data, they must build and implement a customized strategy to maximize the effects of diversity in the workplace for their particular organization.

Successful Management of Diversity in the Workplace - Diversity training alone is not sufficient for your organization's diversity management plan. A strategy must be created and implemented to create a culture of diversity that permeates every department and function of the organization.

Recommended steps that have been proven successful in world-class organizations are:

Assessment of diversity in the workplace - Top companies make assessing and evaluating their diversity process an integral part of their management system. A customizable employee satisfaction survey can accomplish this assessment for your company efficiently and conveniently. It can help your management team determine which challenges and obstacles to diversity are present in your workplace and which policies need to be added or eliminated. Reassessment can then determine the success of your diversity in the workplace plan implementation.

Development of diversity in the workplace plan - Choosing a survey provider that provides comprehensive reporting is a key decision. That report will be the beginning structure of your diversity in the workplace plan. The plan must be comprehensive, attainable and measurable. An organization must decide what changes need to be made and a timeline for that change to be attained.

Implementation of diversity in the workplace plan - The personal commitment of executive and managerial teams is a must. Leaders and managers within organizations must incorporate diversity policies into every aspect of the organization's function and purpose. Attitudes toward diversity originate at the top and filter downward. Management cooperation and participation is required to create a culture conducive to the success of your organization's plan.

Recommended diversity in the workplace solutions include:

Ward off change resistance with inclusion - Involve every employee possible in formulating and executing diversity initiatives in your workplace.

Foster an attitude of openness in your organization - Encourage employees to express their ideas and opinions and attribute a sense of equal value to all.

Promote diversity in leadership positions - This practice provides visibility and realizes the benefits of diversity in the workplace.

Utilize diversity training - Use it as a tool to shape your diversity policy.

Launch a customizable employee satisfaction survey that provides comprehensive reporting - Use the results to build and implement successful diversity in the workplace policies.

As the economy becomes increasingly global, our workforce becomes increasingly diverse. Organizational success and competitiveness will depend on the ability to manage diversity in the workplace effectively. Evaluate your organization's diversity policies and plan for the future, starting today.

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