

County of Tuolumne



Diversity Awareness

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Supervisory Guideline to Diversity

Diversity in the Workplace

As we approach the year 2000, two forces are shaping and changing familiar organizational structures. First, organizations are increasingly relying on teams composed interdepartmentally, interorganizationally, and in more and more cases, internationally. At the same time, changing work-force demographics are forcing organizations to review and revise long-held beliefs and policies. These new organizational teams combined with changing work-force demographics are bringing more and more people from diverse backgrounds into contact with one another. Tuolumne County is not immune to this new reality.

Demographic Changes

As demographics of the U.S. labor force change, there is a resulting increase in gender diversity, cultural diversity and age diversity.

Gender Diversity Issues

Women have become an equal force in the U.S. labor market. In 1991, 46 percent of the work force was female, and they represent 41 percent of the executive, administrative, and managerial work force. 80% of corporate America admits, however, that there still exists internal barriers that keep capable women from reaching the top of their organizations. Until companies remove these barriers, they will not be able to fully utilize the talents of nearly half the employees in their work force, a poor people management situation. The old 1960's corporate culture suited to an all-male work force is just simply no longer effective.

Cultural Diversity Issues

The Department of Labor is projecting a rapid increase in the cultural diversity of the U.S. labor supply. Only 58% of the new entrants into the labor force will come from the "majority" white American-born population. The remaining 42% are expected to be mostly immigrants (22%), followed by approximately equal numbers of African Americans and Hispanic Americans.

When people with different habits and ways of viewing the world come together in the workplace, misunderstandings inevitably occur. For example, employees who behave according to the Anglo-Saxon adage "the squeaky wheel gets the grease" may be viewed as offensive and undesirable teammates by Asian American employees who were taught that "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down." Such misunderstandings can mean that valuable information is poorly transmitted or never gets used.

Age Diversity Issues

Age is affecting the work force in two ways. The average age of the work force is increasing as the baby-boomer generation moves through the work force. Additionally, the distribution of ages is changing as the much smaller population of X-generationers enter the work force. The shrinking rate of growth of the labor pool is pushing employers to hire at both extremes of the age distribution, with the result being that both student interns and former "retirees" are being hired to fill full-time positions. Also, many companies now allow the higher educations of younger employees to substitute for the job experiences that their peers had to accrue to be promoted. As a result, relatively young employees are found more often in higher-level jobs. Consequently, age diversity is replacing the homogeneity associated with traditional age-based distribution. Employees of greatly different ages and generations are now finding themselves working side by side. These different generations differ in their values and attitudes about work, their physical and mental functioning, and the everyday concerns that reflect stages in the life cycle.

The Challenges of Diversity

Diversity influences an organization both in the short-term and the long-term. Diversity is simply a fact of life that influences the recruitment, retention, motivation, and performance of today's employees. In the longer term, effectively working through diversity is imperative for success in a highly competitive environment. Three challenges must be addressed, however, if diversity is to be a positive contributor to an organization. These challenges include: availability, fairness, and synergy.

Availability Challenge

Predictions about the future U.S. work force indicate that the skill levels needed in jobs will surpass the skill levels of the average worker at the turn of the century. The supply of skilled labor will no longer be abundant relative to demand. In the past, employers could refuse to hire employees who were unable to work the standard workweek and punish those who were too often absent or tardy; or who just simply didn't fit in. These practices controlled the diversity of the work force; selective hiring practices were used, and standard operating procedures were imposed. Those who couldn't cut it were easily replaced. But as qualified employees become more scarce, employers must now adapt to employee needs for flexibility, innovative management practices, and "skewed" fairness.

Fairness Challenge

Flexible policies and practices help employers solve the availability issue, but bring them face-to-face with a second challenge: ensuring that all employees are treated fairly. The issue of fair treatment has been driven for many years by legal concerns. In this

context, fair treatment meant equal treatment. In the present and future context, fair treatment has come to mean more than just equal treatment. Now supervisors and managers are expected to treat individuals in a way best suited to those individuals (i.e. differently). The consequences are that outdated legislation requiring that people should not be treated differently because of their race, sex, age, religion, or disabilities may now be a stumbling block to economically driven attempts to make the most of each employee. For example, developing an on-site child care center for employees with children may be illegal based upon federal and state regulations against treating employees differently based upon their marital status or family situations.

Synergy Challenge

Synergy is defined as a state where the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The synergy challenge relates to taking full advantage of the potential of diverse teams. Work teams can be both more productive and more creative than individuals working alone. Yet diversity can also be a liability. Diversity is associated with differences in values, attitudes, styles of interaction, physical and cognitive abilities, and nonwork commitments. For better or worse, the differences associated with diversity may change patterns of behavior. And change is often terrifying.

What is great about diversity?

Diversity leads to better performance. This is based upon differences in perspectives and attitudes and on differences in skills and ability.

When differences in experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of team members exist, these differences lead team members to approach problems and decisions drawing on different information, from different angles, and with different attitudes. Teams composed of members with diverse backgrounds and characteristics can be expected to produce a wider variety of ideas, alternatives, and solutions.

Differences in skills and ability should also lead to improved performance. The presence of high-skill members within the team raises the performance of the whole team for two reasons. First, the team is more likely to find the correct solution or select the best alternative, because of the creativity or divergent thinking processes of the high-ability team members themselves. Second, these high functioning members may actually stimulate other members to use these skills, which they might not otherwise try. Thus, performance may be improved because diverse team members add different skills and abilities; and because diversity stimulates team members to consider more information and more ways of thinking than they would otherwise.

What's the downside of diversity?

Theory and research suggest that diversity has the opposite effect on job attitudes and satisfaction, communication networks, and turnover. Similarity is one of the most

important determinations of attraction, which in turn creates a social context for relationships among organizational members. One theoretical perspective clearly illustrates how this affects organizational behavior. That theory is Schneider's "Attraction ⇒ Selection ⇒ Attrition" Model.

Schneider argued that organizations evolve toward a state of homogeneity (of the same nature or kind) in terms of personality, interests, and values. The "attraction" effect results when people are attracted to and seek membership in organizations whose members they believe are similar to themselves. When current members screen potential new members, they are attracted to similar candidates, so they are more likely to admit new members like themselves. After entering the organization, the new member and the old members become better acquainted, and the similarity attraction effect again influences the feelings and behaviors of the new member. If, however, the match is judged unsatisfactorily, pressures encourage dissimilar members to leave the organization. Over time, this homogenizing process ingrains itself in the human resources system, which creates more homogeneity because selection, promotion, and outflow systems ensure the status quo, leading to an organization that is staffed by "clones" in terms of member personality, interests, and values.

A good example of this theory in practice is the American automotive industry in the 1970's. Each of the companies became ingrained in the thinking that American consumers wanted bigger and costlier cars. Board of Directors, CEOs, and executives of all levels were made of the "same cloth" through the processes outlined above. Their thinking was the same in all strategic areas and when that thinking was wrong - as in the case of bigger and costlier cars - industry wide crisis quickly followed. As Japanese and German cars criss-crossed the nation, the American car makers wasted time wondering what was wrong with the American consumer.

County Efforts Regarding Diversity

The County of Tuolumne has a variety of programs aimed at promoting diversity awareness and tolerance. Some are legally mandated and others, like this training program, are voluntary. We recognize the benefits to be gained from diversity and encourage your support as a supervisor. We also acknowledge the danger of encouraging diversity without training and monitoring.

The County has the following programs that are geared toward diversity tolerance and management. They include:

- Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy
- Equal Employment Opportunity Program
- American's with Disabilities Act Program

Each program is designed to address specific areas of diversity.

Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy

No employment law subject can presently compete with sexual harassment in terms of claims and media coverage. Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual advances, or visual, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. It really has less to do with sex, however, and more to do with control and power. Sexual harassment is the premier gender diversity issue. It is reported that between 70 and 90% of working females experience sexual harassment at some time during their working lives. Although documented statistics only address harassment of women, there is definite evidence that working males also experience harassment now that women are common in management positions - positions of power.

Failure to prevent harassment will eventually bring litigation, not only against the alleged harasser, but against the County and the management responsible to assure a harassment-free workplace. It should, therefore, be a concern of your's. The County's Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy manual is included as Assistance Section #1.

Equal Employment Opportunity Program

Cultural diversity has long been a legal issue. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act established prohibition against discrimination based upon "race, religion, creed, ancestry, sex, age or disability" among other categories added over the last thirty plus years. Employers, and in some cases the offending manager, are held liable for intentional or unintentional actions or treatment which are disparate (unequal) in their application. Employers may take affirmative action (defined as Type I) to prevent disparate treatment through use of monitoring and corrective actions. Failure to take Type I action often leads to legally required affirmative action in the form of hiring quotas (defined as Type II), to make amends for past wrongs. Type I, obviously, is preferable from an employer's perspective.

The County's Equal Employment Opportunity Program is a Type I affirmative action program which monitors County personnel actions on an annual basis and spells out corrective actions where disparate numbers warrant action. A copy of the program is included as Assistance Section #2.

American's with Disabilities Act Program

Title I of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) became effective on July 26, 1992. Title I prohibits the discrimination of a qualified person with a disability in any condition or aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, promotions, and recruitment. Failure leaves the County and the management responsible for the specific action liable for discrimination.

The intention of this act was to help those with disabilities enter employment without barriers and in many cases with assistance - referred to as reasonable accommodation. However, the ADA has turned into an entitlement addendum plan for employee's claiming

permanent injury under workers' comp. Reasonable accommodations in this case are making a manager's job very difficult in terms of staffing and productivity. This has become the main issue that employers are struggling to manage.

The County's American's with Disabilities Program is included in part as Assistance Section #3. Title 2 of the program has to do with facility modifications and has limited relevancy to this discussion. It is, therefore, not included here.

Supervisor's Responsibility

The above programs and policies each place responsibility on the supervisor. Those responsibilities are outlined individually in the specific program manuals. Briefly, however, they include the following.

Sexual Harassment Responsibilities: it is a manager's responsibility to provide a good work environment for his/her staff. This includes providing for a harassment free workplace. The day-to-day enforcement of this policy is the responsibility of each manager and/or supervisor. Any awareness you have of a potential harassment situation must be forwarded for investigation to the Human Resources Office; even if the employee making the claim does not wish for an investigation to be done. Once you as a supervisor are aware you are liable. See Assistance Section #1 for further discussion.

Equal Employment Opportunity Responsibilities: managers are responsible for any disparate actions they intentionally or unintentionally cause. This includes recruitment, promotion, training, and discipline. All personnel actions must be carried out without discriminatory affect. The manager has specific responsibilities under the program to interview any protected class member certified by the HR Office and to give written reason for non-selection. Additionally, managers are charged with giving equal opportunity to all employees in terms of promotional opportunities and training attendance. See Assistance Section #2 for further discussion.

American's with Disabilities Act Responsibilities: managers are held responsible for any action that prohibits inclusion of a qualified person with a disability in any condition or aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, promotions, and recruitment. Managers are also responsible for making reasonable accommodation to an otherwise qualified candidate who is disabled. The responsibilities are complicated and the HR Office should always be consulted. See Assistance Section #3 for further discussion.

Overall, a manager and/or supervisor is responsible for being self-aware of diversity and for understanding it's place in the working world. Managers are required to be supportive of diversity where legally mandated and are encouraged to be supportive of diversity as a benefits the productivity of the work place.

Conclusion

Diversity is a difficult balancing act. On the one-hand, supervisors might be encouraged to take full advantage of the potential benefits of the growing diversity of the work force by ensuring that work teams are composed of dissimilar employees. However, organizations that make these changes without regard to the potential downside of diversity may soon notice lower satisfaction, communication problems, and turnover.