

insights



Diversity Version 3.0

*Including People
with Disabilities*

*Crash Your Comfort Zone
and Experience Real
Multiculturalism*

*Clarks' First Step
Program: Taking a
Step Together*



Diversity Version 3.0

Organizational Development and Continuous Education

By Kari Heistad

The concept of diversity in the workplace has steadily evolved over the last couple decades. Originally it focused primarily on race, but later broadened to include the promotion of women, people with disabilities and the LGBT community. Now, the definition of diversity is expanding further to include aspects such as physical characteristics, background, family status, military service, personality and work style. Today, in essence, diversity is all of the ways that we are similar and different to one another.

The evolution of the concept of diversity over the years has also changed how the diversity field views itself and many organizations now are adding the word “inclusion” to the term “diversity.” Inclusion is an important addition as the field has realized that diversity on its own was not sufficient to describe the work being done as the work is shifting. The old focus was on helping employees to respect and work with people who are different. The new focus is on helping employees understand and include the differences that exist among them to drive results. The evolution from diversity to inclusion is not just a matter of semantics. It is a fundamental shift in seeing the work and purpose of diversity.

While the concept and purpose of diversity is evolving, so too is the practice and application of diversity as an organizational initiative. Diversity work is changing from being stand-alone training and events led by human resources to an organizational development initiative where diversity work becomes restructured as a continuous education system. As this organizational change process takes place, the way that diversity is approached must evolve. When diversity learning stops taking place solely in training rooms and spreads to the

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hallways, offices and desktops of employees, it becomes a more comprehensive and continuous learning environment. With this environment, new opportunities emerge to engage leaders and employees in powerful ways that drive business results. This increased engagement results in workplaces that are more respectful and inclusive.

FROM PROGRAM TO ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Making the transition from diversity to diversity and inclusion (D&I) requires organizations to shift the way D&I is applied to business operations and understood through the organization. Companies need to move from the notion that diversity is an HR-driven program to one where D&I is an organization-wide initiative. This is an initiative that engages

all employees to build upon knowledge, awareness and skills to create a new, more inclusive, respectful corporate culture. Richard Hinton, an HR Generalist for Shawmut Design and Construction, is a long-time diversity advocate, and he speaks to the positive business outcomes that result from running diversity as an OD initiative. *“Diversity and inclusion continue to change. Organizations must notice these changes in order to best understand how to attract and retain key employees, and also establish themselves as a competitive employer and business of choice. An organization that recognizes diversity and inclusion as an OD initiative tied to business goals is one that will see a noticeable improvement in employee engagement, profitability and company vision.”*

In order to effectively move forward to an OD focus for D&I, it is essential that organizations change their view of D&I programs. In isolation, HR-run diversity programs can do a lot to teach employees about respectful workplaces, but many times these programs lose momentum. Too often, employees feel that diversity programs are non-essential and, without ongoing and frequent reinforcement, become disinterested. However, taking an OD approach to diversity and inclusion means that the initiative is fully supported and reinforced on all sides by business operations and the company culture. While human resources may take a leadership role in the diversity and inclusion efforts, operational lines of the business are also engaged. Managers throughout the organization can help to push the initiative forward once they understand how the work helps to decrease friction,

improve communication and fix the real-life challenges that they are facing every day.

This shift to an OD perspective expands the work beyond diversity to inclusion. Inclusion is about the more beneficial work of changing employee behavior. For employees it means that diversity and inclusion is not something done outside of their daily work, but is an integral part of their daily interactions with coworkers and customers. For companies, it means that diversity and inclusion initiatives can be integrated companywide by aligning their D&I goals with the efficiencies learned from previously successful OD programs.

FROM DIVERSITY TRAINING TO DIVERSITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Approaching D&I from an OD perspective also means changing how diversity learning takes place. Companies should build upon their diversity training programs to include the idea of diversity as a continuous education environment. Whereas diversity training is often seen by employees as a short-term program or skill building exercise that is done to them, education is empowering employees to acquire knowledge and skills over the long-term and to integrate that knowledge into their daily interactions. Amica's Sam Palmisano, Sr. Assistant Vice President of

HR, has witnessed, first hand, the benefits of creating a continuous learning environment. *"Our employees are very busy, so we make it a point to be conscious of their schedules when developing content and determining dates for the diversity program. Spreading out modules over the year keeps employees engaged and reinforces the message that diversity is an ongoing part of our culture and not a one shot deal."*

In addition to traditional instructor-lead training, there are many educational tools that can be used on a daily basis to reinforce a culture of inclusiveness, including: manager-led team meetings on diversity topics, online training modules, themed email blasts, newsletter articles,



an online diversity portal, international food in the cafeteria, international holiday calendars, etc. In combination with an OD strategy that supports an inclusive workplace, these tools empower employees to take responsibility in educating themselves about the people that they work with and the customers that they serve. With the richness offered by diversity, there will never be an end point where anyone can say that they have learned it all. Instead, employees will understand that inclusiveness requires life-long education in understanding differences and learning to build respect across those differences. If diversity training was a push in the right direction, diversity as a continuous education environment becomes a pull towards a workplace that employees want to be part of.

UNDERSTANDING AND NAVIGATING THE SHIFT FROM TRAINING PROGRAM TO OD INITIATIVE

For an organization making the shift from diversity program to diversity OD initiative, thoughtful and strategic decisions must be made in order for that initiative to be successful and achieve business results. In our experience, organizations go through a seven-step process to move forward from programmatic training to OD continuous education. We have put these seven steps into a model that provides a practical framework to guide organizations through this transition.

The seven steps of the model help to guide an organization through the different decisions, considerations, goals, resources and time frames that need to be considered when setting up diversity as a continuous learning OD initiative. While each step of the model has additional considerations than what are listed here, this is the basic framework. The emphasis

behind this model is that when you begin to run diversity as an OD initiative, there are many decisions and considerations that must be made. While leveraging the knowledge from past OD initiatives will be helpful, here are some additional success strategies to keep in mind when creating an OD initiative for diversity and inclusion work:

- Seek and gain senior leadership support and active engagement throughout the entire process. Have them model their own personal engagement with the initiative.
- Ensure that the D&I work is closely aligned with organizational goals.
- Focus on augmenting training with ongoing education. Design a comprehensive strategy that layers D&I training, learning tools, themes/topics and programs year after year to reinforce and support your diversity education.
- Provide regular communication to employees about the diversity work, its alignment to organizational goals, and why it is important to them.

Unhappy employees rarely give great customer service.

- Allow sufficient time to implement programs. Diversity is a highly personal and emotional topic for employees. As such, it will require longer implementation than some other OD initiatives. Employees need time to integrate inclusion into their interactions and this can take longer than expected.
- Engage and support managers in the work. Provide them with the training and resources to become advocates for diversity and inclusion within their teams. Help them to use educational



tools such as manager-led team discussions to reduce friction and solve team issues.

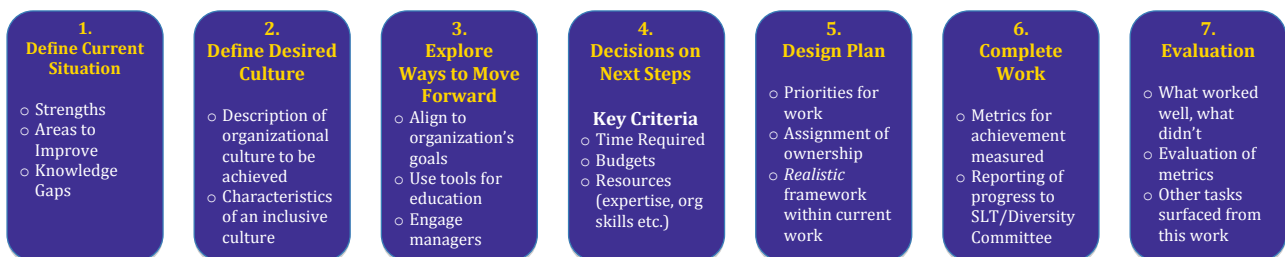
- Engage employees from all levels of the organization in this process to drive success and employee engagement.
- Use diversity champions throughout the organization to gain insights into implementation challenges and success stories.

INCLUSION CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES

While shifting a company's perspective to seeing D&I as an organizational development initiative does bring about a substantial change in regard to how diversity is viewed and approached throughout the organization, this change also creates new efficiencies and business opportunities. A few key opportunities that emerge are:

- Employees have a greater ownership in the creation of an inclusive workplace and therefore their engagement and retention rates rise
- Creating an inclusive workplace directly improves employee interactions on all levels and thus it makes it easier for managers to manage their teams

SEVEN STEPS TO CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



- Diversity and inclusion can now be aligned with company strategy and goals. Some organizational goals where diversity and inclusion can be aligned are:

- ▷ **Employee Engagement:** As the workplace becomes more inclusive, employees feel more empowered to be creative; this results in more focused and efficient work.
- ▷ **Employee Retention:** Employees working in an inclusive workplace are more likely to remain with the organization. This reduces costs both from a recruitment perspective, but also of the institutional knowledge that is lost when a key employee leaves.
- ▷ **Customer Service:** Unhappy employees rarely give great customer service. As employees become more engaged and productive, they are also going to provide better customer service. This in turn helps with customer retention.
- ▷ **Innovation:** While many people may think that innovation and creativity is the result of getting a diverse group of people together, this is not always the case. Diverse groups are innovative when the people involved have the skills to communicate and collaborate with respect. By building an inclusive culture, employees that come together in work teams will already have the necessary skills to effectively communicate. This in turn creates an environment that can foster the interactions and thought necessary for innovation and creativity.

It is an exciting time in the field of diversity and inclusion. Diversity practitioners are now on the cusp of a great opportunity to bring their work directly into the heart of their organization by initiating an organizational change process and running diversity as an OD initiative. This change can profoundly alter how organizations work and grow. For those who come to this work based upon their deep desire to make the world a better place, there has never been a better time than now to put those convictions into practice. Together we can create workplace cultures that celebrate, honor

and leverage the diversity of the human experience and perspectives that employees bring. Let's make this opportunity count. ■

Kari Heistad is the founder and CEO of Culture Coach International (CCI). CCI helps organizations to create workplace cultures that are respectful and inclusive by developing diversity strategies and experiential educational programs that engage employees, managers and

senior leaders. CCI has a line of both standard and customizable educational tools designed for the workplace that help organizations to provide continuous learning on targeted topics. CCI consultants draw upon these tools and more than 100 years of experience to provide thoughtful, strategic and practical solutions for client strategy and training programs. For more information about Culture Coach International please visit: www.CultureCoach.biz.

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