

5 Potentially Bad Habits of a Diverse Workforce

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Workforce diversity or workplace diversity—whatever phrase you choose to use—is not a brand new concept; however, it is relatively new as a means to competitive advantage. An increasing number of large organizations are gradually recognizing the importance and value of a diverse workforce—especially a workforce that reflects the diversity of the local community and the customer base served by the organization. Originally, many large organizations addressed diversity in the workplace in response to equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws. Some of these pursued workforce diversity awareness education and training purely in response to business liability concerns and as a way to mitigate discrimination lawsuits—many of such organizations, sadly, still do today. Subsequently, other organizations with bold and enlightened leadership began to look at a diverse workforce as a competitive business advantage.

As with most strategic initiatives, workforce diversity needs management commitment, effective planning and sustained implementation. However, workforce diversity need not be a strategic initiative—especially if it is intended to become a permanent part of a workplace culture. When a diverse workforce is embraced as a way of doing business, then the benefits that this approach holds are most likely to be realized.

Workforce diversity presents many challenges for an organization. These challenges are a result of the complexities presented by a diverse workforce. These complexities, in turn, emerge as a result of the multiple dimensions to diversity—racial, cultural, gender, generational, and more. However, when an organization makes a good faith effort to embrace workforce diversity without proper planning and sustained implementation, or when an organization views workforce diversity purely from a business liability perspective, then several bad habits are typically observed—often to the detriment of the general workforce. Five of these (bad habits) follow.

Workforce Diversity

Workforce diversity presents many challenges for an organization. These challenges emerge as a result of the multiple dimensions to diversity.

One — Stratified Diversity.

Some organizations claim to have a diverse workforce; however, if you were to take a stroll through different departments and groups in their workplace, you would not observe much of any kind of diversity across the board. Instead, you may observe some level of diversity at a staff level only, within a specific unit only, or in specific roles only. I term this workplace diversity profile as *stratified diversity*. The outcome of a situation like this often includes workforce segregation—employees with common interest bonding and clustering in response to their perceived environment.

Two — Lack of Sustained Awareness.

Other organizations invest time, energy and money to raise awareness concerning a diverse workforce. Soon after the initial push is over—management memos and videos,

diversity education and training, and offsite management retreats—attitudes and things are expected to change for good. But, reality quickly sets in—attitudes do not change overnight and an established workplace culture does not transform easily. Many organizations simply allow things to revert back to their previous state, thereby resulting in wasted investment in time, energy, and money. Some of these organizations fail to realize that when dealing with change in human attitudes and social behavior, a sustained approach is an absolute necessity.

Three — Frequent Occurrence of Favoritism.

When an organization is transformed from a not-so-diverse workforce to a diverse workforce, then certain types of practices and behavior become readily visible. Favoritism is one such practice. Favoritism occurs when an individual in a position of authority exhibits a preference for another individual based on subjective terms—perceived to be unfair. Frequent habits of favoritism can damage employee morale and can overwhelm an organization's human resources department—due to related complaints. Favoritism can be manifested through an unfair recognition process, an unfair reward system, an unjustified promotion, and much more.

Four — H.R. is Stuck With Fixing All Diversity-Related Issues.

Whenever issues arise as a result of conflict rooted in a diverse workforce, the natural instinct is to involve the human resources (HR) department. HR is expected to address and to fix every issue stemming from diversity in the workplace—poor HR! Managing diversity successfully is not the sole responsibility of HR, but a shared responsibility at every level of an organization. HR simply plays a facilitator role in ensuring success.

Five — Lack of leadership Across the Organization.

Another bad habit often ignored by a diverse workforce deals with the lack of diversity leadership—champions—at every level of the organization. This issue typically feeds into the previous issue—HR getting stuck with fixing everything. A diversity champion is an employee at any level of the organization that leads the diversity awareness effort at a local level and on a sustained basis. Such a person would have gone through proper diversity training and would possess strong communication skills. Unfortunately, few diversity champions exist and a diverse workforce simply reverts back to a workforce that appears diverse.

About the Author



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