

Four Ways to **Reinvigo**



Organizations working to develop a diverse and inclusive work environment should count on their diversity councils' participation and support as a critical success factor.

By Philip Berry

rate *Diversity Councils*



On the Web

Certain diverse populations struggle to leverage their untapped potential. To find out how to maximize Latino talent, visit diversity-executive.com/articles/view/1846.

Increasing organizational effectiveness to improve business results is a perennial challenge. Excellent organizations know the status quo is not enough. They know they cannot rest on their laurels, and this same premise holds for sub-units in an organization.

A diversity council can be a critical part of an organization's success in developing a diverse and inclusive work environment. Councils can generate inclusiveness across organizational segments including senior and middle management, rank-and-file and various diverse cohorts. These organizational entities have varying degrees of success in executing their strategies as they progress through their development. However, over time the intent is to become a high-performance work team.

In their study of high-performance work teams, *Innovate Products Faster* authors John Carter and Jeanne Bradford write that high-performance work teams are a key contributor to competitive advan-

tage. Staying at that stage of development has its own challenges, however. In his work on cycles of high-performance work teams, Ken Blanchard, author and co-founder of the Ken Blanchard Cos., said the challenge for team leaders in a stage of high production and performance is to sustain performance through new challenges and continued growth.

It seems to be an oxymoron that success can lead to failure, but it can happen. Organizations at peak performance have to determine what the diversity council should focus on next and how to keep an open mind and prevent the pride of success from leading to arrogance.

One way to do this is to be open to feedback and have mechanisms to assess what a constituency, such as middle managers or senior leaders, thinks about an initiative. Essentially, determine what the next challenge or phase of activity is. Diversity leaders need to have a process in place that enables planning. The diversity council should have an innovation committee that continually evaluates potential future projects.

Diversity leaders can challenge their diversity councils by conducting a situation assessment, implementing a strategic alignment, reviewing organizational capability and promoting sustainability.

The Assessment

The first step is to conduct a situation assessment. Too often diversity councils are established without revisiting the assumptions and data that led to their inception. It could be the council was established to meet a legal requirement. Perhaps there was a critical need to address a diversity crisis at the time. Or, maybe the CEO wanted to be more proactive. As time passes the original rationales may not have the same level of significance. A stronger business case may be necessary to revitalize initiatives.

For example, the initial rationale for the business case to set up the diversity council may have led it to address issues of recruitment of women and African-Americans. A stronger business case would be to focus on development, retention and how to address the values and preferences for a number of diverse segments, including clients, consumers or patients.

A thorough situation assessment can be effective in addressing this issue. This would involve getting quantitative and qualitative data to allow for discovery of new information regarding what the council should address. Quantitatively, it could involve a review of changes in the demographics for customers, clients, consumers or patients to whom a product or service is targeted. Ask questions such as: What is different about demographics in the talent pool? What is the direction of change in trends within these segments?

For example, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that by 2050, the United States will be more diverse. Applicable questions here might be: What are the leading indicators in place now? Are education levels changing? Is there a change in mobility patterns? What is the impact of

A situation assessment is critical to understand how an organization's competition is progressing in diversity. Benchmark by looking at consumer data, stock exchange information and organizational surveys.

more women in the world of work and in educational institutions? These new demographics will mean the council has new challenges, and these differences will dictate how resources are allocated and how efforts are organized.

A situation assessment of an organization's competition is also important. It is critical to understand how the competition is progressing in the diversity area. Benchmark by looking at consumer data, stock exchange information and organizational surveys. Ask: Are their efforts as robust aligning diversity and inclusion to the business? What is the impact of mergers or acquisitions? What about the impact of new products or services?

From a qualitative perspective, it may be necessary to conduct focus groups to get fresh insights into missed opportunities. Conducting qualitative interviews following an organizational employee engagement survey can provide greater insight into the behaviors, thoughts and feelings for certain demographic segments. After conducting a situation assessment, insights can be put into action.

Align With Strategy

Strategic alignment is the next touch point. This is where the diversity leader begins to review the original strategy to assess its relevance within the framework of new insights gained. Many organizations do not review and adjust their strategic architecture within this framework. The strategic architecture consists of vision, mission, goals and objectives that represent direction-setting messages for the organization.

Diversity councils must use new insights to revise their strategic architecture so it is in line with requirements identified by the situation assessment. The diversity council's strategic intent should not be static. It must provide a living, vibrant framework that determines priorities, primary focus areas and resource allocation.

For example, two years ago Colgate-Palmolive decided that based on new global insights regarding the role of women around the world in family decision-making and purchasing decisions, it would get more women involved and establish stronger links to business priorities and strategic initiatives.

Global women councils secured funding from a corporate innovation fund to expand efforts to develop talent and leadership competencies globally.

Eugene Kelly, worldwide director of global diversity and inclusion at Colgate-Palmolive, said that “councils and network groups must stay current by aligning their initiatives with the business strategy or risk being irrelevant.” The result has been increased clarity in many of the countries the company serves regarding product design and formulation.

This touch point can revitalize a council that is high performing because it gives more structure and definition to its purpose and focus areas. It enables the council to go into previously uncharted waters as it seeks to develop new ground.

Develop Council Members

Once an organization decides to realign its strategic architecture, it is critical to review organizational capability. Many efforts fail because they do not examine the framework for executing strategy. Within this touch point, diversity leaders have to review structure, skill and the knowledge portfolio. This is accomplished by assessing whether current committee structures are appropriately addressing new initiatives.

For example, if getting more diversity in suppliers is important, develop a supplier diversity committee. Or, it may be necessary to leverage the growth of the Asian community, which can be accomplished by developing an Asian market development committee and recruiting individuals from marketing and from the Asian talent pool to provide insights.

Further, the increased use of the Internet and remote working arrangements has created a need to use social media to communicate, share information and promote involvement. Diversity councils will not be used to their full potential unless they understand how to use social media to get messages

work that no longer achieves its desired intent.

For example, the diversity council at spice company McCormick decided to expand its committee structures to be more proactive with supplier diversity. The behaviors and initiatives of diversity councils are within the context of their organizational arrangement. If organizations change strategy, behaviors also need to change.

Promote Sustainability

Once organizational capability is in sync with a revision of strategic alignment based on new insights from the situation assessment, sustainability must be addressed. Within sustainability, there are three basic elements.

First, it is critical to develop metrics to monitor results and demonstrate progress against the new agenda. Diversity leaders can ensure metrics are established, measured, regularly evaluated and communicated. The chief diversity officer must certify there is a periodic review of critical metrics by senior management, that action plans come out of the review sessions and that progress against goals is monitored.

For example, at business and IT consulting company Wipro, Chief Diversity Officer Sherene Peart said “we measure everything.” The company’s diversity council reports quarterly plans versus performance reports to the board; the board then provides input on the diversity strategy and initiatives.

In addition to metrics, it is important to have 360-degree communications. Whatever the delivery method, a 360-degree communication will be thorough, reach key internal and external stakeholders and ensure the experience is memorable. Further, it is important to link the diversity and inclusion message with the employer brand to strengthen its significance.

The third sustainability element involves education. Diversity leaders must ensure diversity council members are exposed to new information and learning to facilitate their growth and development. For example, at each meeting there should be a learning component as part of the agenda.

Exposure also involves benchmarking with other councils inside and outside of an organization’s industry. For example, have a planned forum with diversity councils in an industry segment once a year to share best practices and review common problems.

All organizational efforts need to be revitalized or people lose purpose and focus. People — and initiatives — get fatigued and need to be reinvigorated. Diversity leaders can keep people motivated and excited, and they play a pivotal role in enabling diversity councils to refresh their initiatives.

Discovering new challenges when an organization is at peak performance promotes engagement and sustains ongoing involvement. It also generates creativity, which delivers innovation, and builds enthusiasm and a new sense of purpose. «

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across. Establish a social media committee or expand a communications committee to enable the council to be more current, relevant and viable.

The council may decide it needs to recruit new members who can be resources for this committee. Or, it may decide that it needs to train some of its members to increase their skill and knowledge. This is a critical touch point for diversity leaders. It enables them to revitalize a structural frame-