



Lack of Diversity in Management in the Workplace

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Successful organizations often have blind spots when it comes to training for meaningful change for diversity and inclusion. What can be done to help them recognize and successfully implement the training that will help overcome diversity challenges? For example, in this scenario, a large employee-owned construction company has a long legacy of people development. The core values of the company include both people and sustainability, leaving behind a stronger company through training and mentoring others. Employees become owners by buying shares of the company and can only do so when recommended and approved by other employee owners. The company is very successful, with a dedicated staff, many who work for the company for their full careers and a workforce that follows the company from project to project around the country. As a result, ownership of the company over the long term is financially rewarding for individual participants. However, the company also has a prevalent and pervasive lack of diversity in management and top leadership despite broad efforts to recruit more diverse college graduates, a more diverse workforce, and more diverse clients.

Addressing Diversity in Management

The existing values of the company lend themselves well to consciously resolve the issue over a single generation, however training of the existing leadership and management on implicit biases and how to overcome them is a necessary first step. It is not difficult to discern that affinity

bias plays a significant role in who gets developed, mentored, and asked to become a shareholder in the company.

The company has a newly promoted vice president of human resources, a minority who has built his full, impressive career at the company. When discussing the topic, he confirmed that there was awareness that implicit bias training would be beneficial. He described that top leadership was supportive of training on the topic, but that they did not want the name of the training to include the term “implicit biases”. When pressed further on the reasons for this position, he confided that they did not want their employees to feel like the company was calling them racists.

Strategies for Implementation

It would be easy to write off leadership perception as an example of modern racism in which the privileged majority do not recognize their privilege, rather viewing their own success to be a result of their own efforts inside a color-blind meritocracy, but that does not solve the problem of building a sustainable company over the long term (Healey, 2019). Talking further with the vice president of human resources, his perspective was that the need to do the training was bigger and more important than what the training would be called, and he was excited to be pressing forward with developing the program.

The situation presents as a real-world example of the intersection of the quantum nature of adult education and advocacy within an organization (Vella, 2002, Daley, 2011). The quantum approach to education stresses the importance of the needs assessment, safety, relationships between the teacher and the students, and immediacy of the learning, all things that will be essential for the training to be successful (Vella, 2002). But before the teaching could commence, the human resource vice president recognized that to do the training, he had to advocate for the idea, building

on his personal brand, framing the message correctly, telling a good story of why it was important, and forming alliances within the company to make it happen (Daley, 2011).

Following up on the status of the training two months later, the vice president was pleased to report that the completed program is called “Mutual Respect” and is intended to be taught as part of the compliance training. He did acknowledge that he still had a couple of hurdles left for full authorization to include the material but seemed optimistic that he could make it happen. Hopefully, he will solidify alliances with the remaining decision makers to continue his efforts building a more just, diverse, and successful company.

Reflection Questions

1. How would you advocate for the importance of implicit bias training to improve diversity to the top leadership of a company?
2. Who would you seek out as allies?
3. How would you make the training safe and create immediacy for the employees?
4. Lastly, how can an organization learn without fear of shame?

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BIOGRAPHY



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