

Steps to Attracting, Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

von Alev Dudek

There are several steps to a successful management of workforce diversity: attracting, recruiting, hiring (selecting) and retaining. Each step of these *human resources* practices must be accompanied by anti-discrimination-and diversity-awareness. Diversity may not be limited to few aspects, i.e. gender, but rather be approached with a well-balanced perspective such as diversity of race, national origin, ethnicity, gender, social class, disability, accent, and the list goes on. Companies need to determine what “types” of diversity they are lacking, before determining strategies to achieve a healthy balance.

In Germany, many companies limit their efforts to a few aspects of diversity (http://www.rolandberger.com/media/press/releases/Role_of_Diversity_and_Inclusion_in_German_business.html) such as gender or age diversity. The limiting of diversity efforts to few aspects means conducting inefficient diversity management. That in turn means that companies are spending money to promote diversity, but are not getting the expected return for their investments.

Many organizations in Germany also conduct less efficient diversity management as they concentrate mainly on *nurturing* diversity. However, the first and most important step in diversity management after assessing the need of the organization is the *recruiting* of diverse people.

Before considering how to manage a diverse workforce, organizations first have to have a diverse workforce to manage. Given the many challenges in Germany’s less flexible recruitment processes and the existing lack of workforce diversity, organizations have to be very creative to attract diversity in the first place. As the less diverse an organization is, the more difficult it is to attract diversity to that organization.

Efficient steps to a successful diversity management may be as follows:

Diversity in the Recruitment Process

One of the initial steps to recruiting diversity is determining how to word the job postings and where to post them. In case of network hiring, it is important to keep in mind that the goal is to hire diverse people. Network hiring unfortunately leads to a less diverse recruitment, because most people interact with people who are “like them.” Therefore the chances of hiring people who are similar to the current employees are higher when practicing network hiring.

Recruiters should *actively* seek to recruit diverse people. They should not rely on diverse candidates to find them. There are many reasons for this. Many diverse candidates may not apply for a job at an organization based on past experiences of (perceived) discrimination at other organizations, perception about the organization and the candidate’s perceived lack of chances of getting hired and so forth. Many diverse candidates simply may not think of applying at an organization due to the lack of visibility or the image of the organization. If an organization’s goal is to diversify the workforce, a proactive approach will be necessary, no

matter what the reasons may be that diverse candidates in the past have not applied or were not hired at that organization. Locating the diverse talent that is a good fit is the organization job.

Here are some examples for recruitment outreach: if the goal is, i.e. to increase the ethnic diversity in an organization, a good strategy might be to find out what type of news and educational sources diverse, if applicable, well-educated people utilize. The job announcements should be posted at the appropriate locations, websites, newspapers, magazines etc. that will help reach the targeted candidates.

The posting should clearly communicate that the organization does not discriminate. However, such statements are common and therefore may not be as effective as for example, an encouraging statement asking for diverse people to apply. The posting should not only state that the organization values diversity but also why. A personalized statement for diversity appreciation can be very attractive to diverse candidates.

Diversity in the Hiring Process

The hiring criteria should avoid pitfalls such as using grades exclusively to hire someone. Grades can be used as one factor in the hiring process. They can be i.e. an indication of a level of conformity that organizations need in order to succeed. However, if used as the only criteria in a selection process, it will lead to (unintended) discrimination as school systems generally reflect and favor the dominant culture; meaning, disadvantage minorities. Using grades exclusively may also affect older employees adversely. For example, if a candidate's degree goes back 20 years, the standards may have been different at the time the degree was obtained, or the candidate may not have all A's but may have developed himself professionally over the years. Judging him only by his grades in high school may have an unfair negative impact on the candidate.

Best use of grades would be to include them in a *package of criteria* which the final hiring decision will be based on. Examples for what would go into such a *package* are recommendations from former employers or teachers, awards, certificates, personal development efforts.

Another good strategy to attract diversity is to allow candidates to replace the educational requirement for a position with work experience and vice versa. For example, instead of looking for a recent graduate with a Master Degree, allowing the Master Degree to be replaced with a Bachelor Degree and 5 years of related work experience. Such flexibility will help attract more talented diverse candidates.

No matter what the criteria, during the interview process, all candidates should be treated equally and asked the same questions. The more diverse and culturally sensitive the interviewing panel, the higher are the chances for a fair hiring with a diverse outcome. A detailed and uniformed documentation of the selection process is highly recommended in case of litigation as well.

Diversity in Employee Retention Process i.e. Promotions

For drawing the most value out of a diverse workforce, it is important to avoid clustering of diverse people in some departments or functions. The goal should be to spread diversity across the organization vertically and horizontally. Some clusters are natural and should be welcomed as some positions are filled through referrals and networks. Also, people tend to be drawn to people that they identify themselves with which in turn tend to be people who are “like them.”

However, i.e. the clustering of ethnic people in departments related to diversity and inclusion, while they are missing in finance or IT departments, would not be the best use of diversity.

One way to avoid an extensive clustering would be to offer intercultural social events where employees from different departments can network with each other.

It is important to communicate that the organization values diversity also when it comes to promotions. Employees want to feel that hard work is what determines promotions, not office politics, discriminatory or unrelated factors.

Additional effective ways to nurture diversity are offering a flexible work schedule, flexible religious holiday options, kosher or vegan meal at the cafeteria, and the list goes on.

The key for an effective diversity management is to involve all new employees in a mandatory training session for a *harassment free work environment*. This will ensure that all employees are aware of the organization’s policies regarding this important topic. Diverse associates in the organization will appreciate knowing that harassment is not tolerated. Such a mandatory training will provide the appropriate resources to help increase the chances that a harassment incident is reported in a timely and effective manner so that harassment can be dealt with immediately and professionally.

A mandatory training will communicate that the organization takes diversity and inclusion seriously. In case an employee has to be let go due to a harassment incidence, it will make accusations of not having been aware of related company policies more difficult. It will also provide the company with an advantage in case of litigation.

Diversity and Separation

Diversity is a factor that needs to be considered during layoffs or other separation processes as well. When letting go employees, organizations have to make sure that they are not mainly letting go diverse people or people with certain traits; information that can be successfully used for an anti-discrimination complaint. When letting go employees, organizations have to conduct diversity management, in a similar manner as when hiring an employee.

Conclusion

For a successful diversity management, diversity must be a factor in every step of the human resources processes. Talented diverse people are aware that only an organization that

reflects them will be a good place for them to work. Establishing diversity in an organization is a long-term process. The less diverse an organization is, the more effort it will take to attract diversity. If companies in Germany want to continue to be successful into the next decade, they will need to re-evaluate their diversity strategies and make sure that those strategies are broad and effective enough to carry the organization into the future.

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