

Critical Success Factors for an Inclusive Diversity Initiative

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Assumptions & Critical Success Factors

We recommend that Senior Management, Human Resources and Inclusive Diversity Councils discuss and align with the following assumptions, which in our experience function as critical success factors for an Inclusive Diversity Initiative. We are aware that the implementation of these recommendations is in many respects an iterative process. That is, some decisions, such as resources and funding, must be made initially and also will be re-visited when leaders have had the benefit of advanced training and more effective dialogue on the strategic design of the initiative.

CSF #1. Senior Leadership Commit to a Multi-Year Initiative. The issues under scrutiny are extremely complex, multivariate subjects, maintained by deeply emotional and largely unconscious forces, as well as long-standing institutional and cultural practices. Our society has struggled with effective approaches to equity issues during the entire course of US history. It is therefore within the context of an anticipated lifelong journey that we will be launching and sustaining this initiative.

CSF #2. Include All the Historical –isms. There is no hierarchy of oppressions. Members of our community will each determine, on the basis of their experience in a variety of cultural groups, which of the –isms are their initial interest and concern. Ultimately, for the initiative to fulfill its purpose, we envision all members of our community being knowledgeable and skilled at identifying and confronting all of the forms of modern –isms as they continue to play out in our society and organization.

CSF #3. Commit to Adopting a Unified Conceptual Approach. The most successful initiatives are based on one comprehensive model that incorporates issues and actions throughout the organization. In order to be systemically effective it will be important to consciously adopt and maintain a common language for planning, training and evaluation purposes. Multiple theories and languages leave members of the community without the ability to teach and support each other in such a complex endeavor. A unified conceptual approach that is teachable and learnable over time allows skill-building to grow exponentially.

CSF #4. Plan and Account for Strategic Action at Each of the Four Levels: Personal, Interpersonal, Institutional, and Cultural. The -isms were created and have been maintained historically through the interaction of these logical levels of activity. A successful initiative in a system as complex as ours can only be accomplished with conscious planning and meaningful results at each of these levels. Therefore, as early as possible we encourage everyone to become familiar with these distinctions.

CSF #5. Create an Internal Inclusive Diversity Council and Publish the Process by Which it is Chosen and How it Will Operate. The Inclusive Diversity Council will be the cross-functional working group that studies issues, recommends and often leads action on a broad front throughout the organization. Since it is almost never possible to constitute a diversity council with representatives from each and every important constituency, it will be a well-conceived process, fully disclosed, that will provide leadership groups with good will and authority. The process by which the Inclusive Diversity Council is constituted is always an important symbolic message to the community.

CSF #6. Define and Allocate Adequate Resources to the Initiative. If this is done from the outset it empowers those who are devoting their time and energy to the success of the initiative. Planning will ensue that identifies both funded and unfunded action items. In addition contributors are encouraged by the knowledge that the time they are spending will be protected and existing work will be back-filled if necessary with staff support. Defining resources of time, staffing and funds will free the Inclusive Diversity Council up to engage in the critical work of the initiative that only they can accomplish.

CSF #7. The Inclusive Diversity Council Commit Itself to Becoming a Learning Laboratory. The cultural differences that already exist within the group can be utilized for learning purposes as the group executes its action strategies. It takes several years to learn and integrate the known set of effective multicultural leadership skills, and it is essential that the Diversity Council demonstrate capacity for both learning and teaching such skills, because the Council will be the on-going, internal source of guidance to the organization during the life of the initiative. Moreover, it is only through the experience of receiving great personal value from the learning environment that members of the Diversity Council could be expected to maintain their heartfelt commitment to such an endeavor over such a period.

CSF #8. Identify both Personal Objectives and Institutional Outcomes for the Inclusive Diversity Council. Diversity working groups do not naturally agree about the priorities for action in such a large organization. Moreover they hardly ever agree on the process for undertaking action on a given priority. It is the very nature of multicultural work that one group's ideas about goals and process are different from those of other groups. Therefore, it is essential that room be provided for each member of the Inclusive Diversity Council to be supported in following their particular passion while the group as a whole commits to an agreed set of institutional outcomes.

CSF #9. Commit to Adequate Training for the Inclusive Diversity Council and Senior Management. Our previous language and skill sets, even though well-intended, are not enough to get us where we want to go. The finest cast of actors and musicians, with all their individual skill and experience, know that they must rehearse extensively together in order to ensure a successful performance. Merely to appear on the same stage, at the same time, under the same marquee, would not guarantee a memorable event.

CSF #10. Senior Management Commit to Learning and Modeling Culturally Competent Behavior. This is the single greatest predictor of the success of an inclusive diversity initiative. While it is especially symbolic and empowering for Senior Management to show up as invested in learning and leading by example, this success factor also includes all other constituent groups who have leadership influence in the community, certainly all those with teaching positions or supervisory authority over others. Modeling recognizable competent behavior is made possible by training in a consistent unified model that offers a distinct description of effective behaviors.

CSF #11. Define Performance Development Competencies According to Demonstrable Skills at the Four Levels: Personal, Interpersonal, Institutional and Group. Systematic acquisition of cultural competency skills throughout the organization depends strongly on supervisors' utilization of a clear, teachable, learnable Performance Development Review procedure that is organized in a manner appealing and useful to the supervisor. The language and concepts employed in the Performance Development Review system should be consistent with and clearly linked to the common language and assumptions provided in the on-going inclusive diversity trainings.

CSF #12. Ensure All Activities Within the Initiative Create an Affirming, Respectful Experience for All Participants. Every activity should be directly connected to creating personal and organizational value for each participant. Planning meetings, supervision sessions and inclusive diversity trainings must all exemplify a non-blaming/non-shaming environment for everyone involved. Injurious transactions should be identified, interrupted and learned from at the earliest possible moment in order to authentically create the culture of inclusive diversity the organization intends. The organizations that succeed most fully at their initiatives are those that create learning environments so relevant and so respectful that their participants experience joy and excitement about being engaged on the journey.