

Chapter 12: Managing Diversity in the Workplace

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The Chancellor's Committee on Diversity defines Diversity as:

"The variety of experiences and perspective which arise from differences in race, culture, religion, mental or physical abilities, heritage, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and other characteristics."

So why is it when many people think of diversity, they think first of ethnicity and race, and then gender? Diversity is much broader. Diversity is otherness or those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet present in other individuals and groups.

It's important to understand how these dimensions affect performance, motivation, success, and interactions with others. Institutional structures and practices that have presented barriers to some dimensions of diversity should be examined, challenged, and removed. A good starting-point for thinking about diversity is to become familiar with **UC's systemwide Non-Discrimination Statement**:

"It is the policy of the University not to engage in discrimination against or harassment of any person employed or seeking employment with the University of California on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran. This policy applies to all employment practices, including recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer, merit increase, salary, training and development, demotion, and separation."

Of course, diversity also encompasses a wide variety of other differences, including work experience, parental status, educational background, geographic location, and much more. And managing diversity means more than simply observing legal and policy requirements. It also means actively promoting community and comfort with difference, as noted in **UCSF's Principles of Community**:

"We recognize, value, and affirm that social diversity contributes richness to the University community and enhances the quality of campus life for individuals and groups. We take pride in our various achievements and we celebrate our differences."

As this suggests, workplace diversity can provide tremendous benefits in terms of improved morale, outside-the-box thinking, greater teamwork, and an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect.

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Guiding Principles

- Workforce diversity is a reality at San Francisco. We already reflect the national demographic trends predicted for the year 2000 by the Hudson Institute in its 1987 report, Workforce 2000. Accommodation issues for our diverse workforce, such as childcare, elder care, flexible work arrangements, disability accommodation, and literacy are being addressed in the workplace.
- Managing diversity is defined as "planning and implementing organizational systems and practices to manage people so that the potential advantages of diversity are maximized while its potential disadvantages are minimized," according to Taylor Cox in "Cultural Diversity in Organizations."
- Managing diversity well provides a distinct advantage in an era when flexibility and creativity are keys to competitiveness. An organization needs to be flexible and adaptable to meet new customer needs.

- Heterogeneity promotes creativity and heterogeneous groups have been shown to produce better solutions to problems and a higher level of critical analysis. This can be a vital asset at a time when the campus is undergoing tremendous change and self-examination to find new and more effective ways to operate.
- With effective management of diversity, the campus develops a reputation as an employer of choice. Not only will you have the ability to attract the best talent from a shrinking labor pool, you can save time and money in recruitment and turnover costs.
- The campus will fulfill its role as a public institution by reflecting the diversity of the state as well as meeting the increasing demand to provide informed services to an increasingly diverse customer base.

How Well Do You Manage Diversity?

- Do you test your assumptions before acting on them?
- Do you believe there is only one right way of doing things, or that there are a number of valid ways that accomplish the same goal? Do you convey that to staff?
- Do you have honest relationships with each staff member you supervise? Are you comfortable with each of them? Do you know what motivates them, what their goals are, how they like to be recognized?
- Are you able to give negative feedback to someone who is culturally different from you?
- When you have open positions, do you insist on a diverse screening committee and make additional outreach efforts to ensure that a diverse pool of candidates has applied?
- When you hire a new employee, do you not only explain job responsibilities and expectations clearly, but orient the person to the campus and department culture and unwritten rules?
- Do you rigorously examine your unit's existing policies, practices, and procedures to ensure that they do not differentially impact different groups? When they do, do you change them?
- Are you willing to listen to constructive feedback from your staff about ways to improve the work environment? Do you implement staff suggestions and acknowledge their contribution?
- Do you take immediate action with people you supervise when they behave in ways that show disrespect for others in the workplace, such as inappropriate jokes and offensive terms?
- Do you make good faith efforts to meet your affirmative action goals?
- Do you have a good understanding of institutional isms such as racism and sexism and how they manifest themselves in the workplace?
- Do you ensure that assignments and opportunities for advancement are accessible to everyone?

If you were able to answer yes to more than half the questions, you are on the right track to managing diversity well.

Managing Diversity

To address diversity issues, consider these questions: what policies, practices, and ways of thinking and within our organizational culture have differential impact on different groups? What organizational changes should be made to meet the needs of a diverse workforce as well as to maximize the potential of all workers, so that San Francisco can be well positioned for the demands of the 21st century?

Most people believe in the golden rule: treat others as you want to be treated. The implicit assumption is that how you want to be treated is how others want to be treated. But when you look at this proverb through a diversity perspective, you begin to ask the question: what does respect look like; does it look the same for everyone? Does it mean saying hello in the morning, or leaving someone alone, or making eye contact when you speak?

It depends on the individual. We may share similar values, such as respect or need for recognition, but how we show those values through behavior may be different for different groups or individuals. How do we know what different groups or individuals need? Perhaps instead of using the golden rule, we could use the platinum rule which states: "treat others as *they* want to be treated." Moving our frame of reference from what may be our default view ("our way is the best way") to a diversity-sensitive perspective ("let's take the best of a variety of ways") will help us to manage more effectively in a diverse work environment.

Your Role

You have a key role in transforming the organizational culture so that it more closely reflects the values of our diverse workforce. Some of the skills needed are:

- an understanding and acceptance of managing diversity concepts
- recognition that diversity is threaded through every aspect of management
- self-awareness, in terms of understanding your own culture, identity, biases, prejudices, and stereotypes
- willingness to challenge and change institutional practices that present barriers to different groups

It's natural to want a cookbook approach to diversity issues so that one knows exactly what to do. Unfortunately, given the many dimensions of diversity, there is no easy recipe to follow. Advice and strategies given for one situation may not work given the same situation in another context.

Managing diversity means acknowledging people's differences and recognizing these differences as valuable; it enhances good management practices by preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Good management alone will not necessarily help you work effectively with a diverse workforce. It is often difficult to see what part diversity plays in a specific area of management.

The Office of Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity is experienced in providing help with training and advice on the variety of situations that occur, tailored to your specific environment. Their website is www.aaeod.ucsf.edu.

To illustrate, the following two examples show how diversity is an integral part of management. The first example focuses on the area of selection, the second example looks at communication:

Issues

- How do you make the job sound appealing to different types of workers?
- How can recruitment be effectively targeted to diverse groups?
- How do you overcome bias in the interviewing process, questions, and your response?

Strategies

- Specify the need for skills to work effectively in a diverse environment in the job, for example: "demonstrated ability to work effectively in a diverse work environment."
- Make sure that good faith efforts are made to recruit a diverse applicant pool.
- Focus on the job requirements in the interview, and assess experience but also consider transferable skills and demonstrated competencies, such as analytical, organizational, communication, coordination. Prior experience has not necessarily mean effectiveness or success on the job.
- Use a panel interview format. Ensure that the committee is diverse, unit affiliation, job classification, length of service, variety of life experiences, etc. to represent different perspectives and to eliminate bias from the selection process. Run questions and process by them to ensure there is no unintentional bias.
- Ensure that appropriate accommodations are made for disabled applicants.
- Know your own biases. What stereotypes do you have of people from different groups and how well they may perform on the job? What communication styles do you prefer? Sometimes what we consider to be appropriate or desirable qualities in a candidate may reflect more about our personal preferences than *about the skills needed to perform the job*.

Fair vs. Same Treatment

Many people think that "fairness" means "treating everyone the same." How well does treating everyone the same work for a diverse staff? For example, when employees have limited English language skills or reading

proficiency, even though that limit might not affect their ability to do their jobs, transmitting important information through complicated memos might not be an effective way of communicating with them. While distributing such memos to all staff is "treating everyone the same," this approach may not communicate essential information to everyone. A staff member who missed out on essential information might feel that the communication process was "unfair." A process that takes account of the diverse levels of English language and reading proficiency among the staff might include taking extra time to be sure that information in an important memorandum is understood. Such efforts on the part of supervisors and managers should be supported and rewarded as good management practices for working with a diverse staff.

Managing Diversity is Different from Affirmative Action

Managing diversity focuses on maximizing the ability of all employees to contribute to organizational goals. Affirmative action focuses on specific groups because of historical discrimination, such as people of color and women. Affirmative action emphasizes legal necessity and social responsibility; managing diversity emphasizes business necessity. In short, while managing diversity is also concerned with underrepresentation of women and people of color in the workforce, it is much more inclusive and acknowledges that diversity must work for everyone.

Consequences of Ignoring Diversity

Ignoring diversity issues costs time, money, and efficiency. Some of the consequences can include unhealthy tensions; loss of productivity because of increased conflict; inability to attract and retain talented people of all kinds; complaints and legal actions; and inability to retain valuable employees, resulting in lost investments in recruitment and training.