Considering Change:
Measuring Diversity success

Companies want to show diversity success. It's good for business. But what are the measures? HR metrics—measuring the "people" side of things in organizations—is a work in progress. Diversity metrics are evolving. Identifying what and how to measure, then doing it consistently, is part of successful change.

Most companies start with the basics. We count how well different people (usually protected groups) are represented in the applicant pool and workforce. To be meaningful, these counts are broken down by departments and management levels. There are other "hard" measures, like disparate turnover rates, absenteeism and grievances. Companies may also look at contract awards to make sure that they are doing business across a spectrum of vendors that includes small, women- and minority-owned businesses.

Getting different people in the door is one thing. Keeping people is another. We know that inclusive culture is essential to diversity success. But how do we measure "culture"?

Cultural climate surveys are another type of metric. Building on the work of diversity leader and author Taylor Cox, Jr., some researchers have begun to define and measure key components of inclusive workplace culture by asking questions in six key areas. These six factors measure the organizational climate for diversity.

Four of these factors are positive:

Acculturation refers to how well different groups get along and to what extent employees feel like they can openly express themselves at work. Self-expression can take many forms, from cultural expression in fashion, to prayer practices, to ideas and opinions.

Organizational Identification is like loyalty. It refers to a sense of belonging, commitment and ownership. I talked with a supervisor who once said, "I wake up excited to come to work here. Sure, there are challenges. But this is so much more meaningful than anything else I can imagine doing. I wouldn't want to work anywhere else." That's "organizational identification"!

Informal Integration asks whether interactions and decision-making happen equally with all individuals and groups in the workplace. For example, is everyone included in unofficial gatherings, like water cooler conversations, lunch or golf invitations and the annual holiday party?

Structural Integration refers to policies and practices like recruitment, hiring and performance management. Pay equity, leave and flex policies, mentoring and succession-planning all fit here, as do less obvious things, like whether diverse employees serve in all company teams and functions—diversity-related or not.

Two additional factors measure the down side:

Cultural Bias measures the extent to which discrimination and/or prejudice exist in the workplace.

Inter-group Conflict refers to friction or disagreements between employees of different groups, whether groups are defined by generation, gender, race or department. With the passing of the legendary Johnny Cochran, we are reminded of the O.J. Simpson case when opinions sometimes seemed more related to one's group experience (in this case, race) than to all the facts.

Surveys can be constructed to ask questions in each of these areas. Results that show high positive elements and an absence of the two negative ones suggest a positive climate for diversity.

When considering change, think about how you'll show progress. Your goal is for all employees to feel that they "wouldn't want to work anyplace else!"

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JODY ALYN
consulting