Managing Diverse Talent:

Best Practices in Sourcing, Attracting, and Retaining Diverse Employees

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Abstract

This paper explores the importance of diversity in the workplace and how to create a more diverse workforce. It explores the competitive advantages associated with employing diverse talent and how that can translate to greater profits. It also looks at best practices in recruiting diverse employees, specifically where to find diverse talent and how to attract it. It also focuses on what efforts should be made to ensure the retention of diverse talent and how to foster an organizational culture that supports diversity and inclusion.

Introduction

Many organizations are finally realizing the benefits associated with a diverse workforce. Diverse employees are often able to contribute added value through their varying perspectives outside of those held by the typical straight white male employee. Given that organizations are just starting to realize the value of diversity, recruitment efforts of diverse candidates are not standard practice.

Diversity includes people of different genders, ethnicities, abilities, ideologies, religions, orientations, and any number of other characteristics. It's also important to note that a homogenous workplace that only employs a typically underrepresented population is still lacking in diversity. A truly diverse team consists of people of all backgrounds, including those who are typically in the majority. For the purposes of this paper, diverse candidates will refer to candidates that are often underrepresented in the typical American workplace, specifically people of color and women, however, many of the practices referenced in this paper can be applied to other demographics.

One of the roadblocks involved with recruiting diverse candidates is that it is not readily apparent if recruitment efforts are helping or hindering an organization's ability to recruit diverse

candidates. For example, a recruiter often won't know how diverse their talent pool may be, because they often don't know a candidates race or possibly even their gender unless they meet with them, in person, for an interview. This can make it difficult for organizations to realize that their sourcing efforts aren't attracting diverse talent. The author hopes to better understand best practices as they relate to sourcing, attracting, and retaining diverse employees. It's important for recruiters to understand these best practices so they can improve the diversity of their workforce to benefit their organization.

The Importance of Diversity

Before an organization can start effectively recruiting diverse talent, organizations need to understand why it's important to recruit diverse talent. Many organizations see diversity as legally mandated. They think of anti-discrimination lawsuits and see diversity through a lens of following the law. Organizations that view diversity as utilizing quotas or developing strategies to avoid violating Title VII, fail to recognize the true value of a diverse workplace. While there are laws to promote tolerance and diversity, organizations would be wise to strive for a diverse workplace, regardless of the existence of these laws. To truly value diversity and adopt it in the workplace, organizations need to change their mindset. They need to recognize the inherent value of a diverse workforce, as opposed to viewing it as something that is mandated by the government.

A diverse workplace offers a lot of advantages to organizations. According to Lee Biggins (2018), a contributing author to realbusiness.co.uk, a diverse workforce can lead to increased creativity and new ways of thinking (p. 1). In our current society, employers value employees who are able to problem solve and think critically. While an individual employee may not be strong in these areas, a diverse team is more likely to be able to approach situations with

different ways of thinking. A diverse team of employees have all had different experiences that shaped who they are, which allows them to approach situations from a variety of perspectives. If a workforce is homogenous, it can lead to them having a limited scope when addressing situations.

The added value that diverse talent can bring can also create higher profits for an organization. According to a report conducted by McKinsey & Company, "the top racially diverse tech companies are 35% more likely to have financial returns higher than the tech sector's national median" (Webb, 2017, p. 1). These profits show that companies that recognize the importance of diversity are benefitting from it. Aside from the variety of perspectives diverse talent can bring with them, an organization that emphasizes diversity may also be able to better support their customers and will find it easier to attract top talent. According to Biggins (2018), supporting diversity opens organizations up to a bigger pool of talent (p. 1). Many employees want to work for organizations that support diversity, so doing so could attract better talent. As for customers, many of them are socially conscious and want to support organizations that value diversity.

To be clear, there are a number of different characteristics a team can possess to make it diverse. Diversity is not limited to just one type of representation, but many. The same report from McKinsey & Company states, "[tech] companies that are more gender diverse are 15% more likely to outperform others, and those that are ethnically diverse are 35% more likely to do better than others. (Webb, 2017, p. 1). Organizations that are successful in hiring diverse talent that represents their customer base, will be able to better serve their customers, leading to higher profits.

Sourcing Diverse Candidates

Once a company understands the importance of having a diverse workforce and the competitive advantages it can give an organization, the next step is hiring diverse talent. One of the most important steps in hiring is determining where to source candidates from. If a company is lacking in diversity, there is a good chance that there typical sourcing methods are not producing diverse candidates. According to SHRM contributor Anna Peters (2018), the "post and pray" method is not going to result in high quality diverse candidates (p. 1). To find top talent, especially top talent that's diverse, organizations need to take an active approach.

It's important for employers to explore new sourcing methods to seek out the type of employee they are looking for, but organizations should not abandon their more traditional methods. According to Dr. Caren Golderg (n.d.), an Associate Professor at Bowie State University, "focusing on recruitment sources that target nontraditional applicant groups at the expense of sources that target traditional applicant pools could result in claims of reverse discrimination" (p. 4). Organizations should not abandon their previous methods if they resulted in finding great talent, even if that talent was homogenous. Instead, they need to focus on casting a wider net, which should result in finding more great talent that is also diverse.

One of the most effective ways to source diverse talent is to create a recruitment network that includes people from the demographic recruiters are searching for. According to SHRM contributor Paul Wolfe (2018), partnering with the right academic institutions and organizations can create a diverse pipeline of talent (p. 1). Academic institutions can be a great way to find entry-level candidates. For example, if an organization is looking to attract more black candidates, focusing recruiting efforts at historically black schools is a great way to find those candidates (Golderg, n.d., p. 3). Focusing efforts at schools that don't charge tuition can also be a

great way to find candidates that break the mold from the typical privileged white male often seen at businesses.

There are a number of ways organizations can partner with academic institutions. Most colleges and universities have a career office dedicated to setting up these partnerships and helping their students find jobs. Contacting a college career office is a great place to start. These career offices will often host career fairs on campus, where organizations can attend and get access to hundreds of potential candidates. Another way to partner with academic institutions is to build relationships with professors who teach material related to the organization's industry. Professors can recommend students that perform well in their classes. Another avenue would be to contact student organizations on campus. For example, an organization looking for engineers may want to contact the women in engineering club at the college. All of these possibilities can be a great starting point for any organization looking for diverse talent.

Even though there are so many options available, organizations should determine which options are most successful for them and strengthen their relationship with that option. Developing relationships with different groups on a college campus can be mutually beneficial (Peters, 2018, p. 1). As candidates are hired from these groups, the relationship should strengthen.

Diverse employees are also one of the greatest assets an organization has in recruiting diverse talent. According to Joanna Coles, chief content officer of Hearst magazine, hiring a senior marketing editor, who was African-American, helped increase the staff's diversity by finding new networks to recruit from (Feloni, 2018, p. 1). People often build personal recruitment networks that are similar to their own demographics. Utilizing the diverse talent an organization already has can be a great way to tap into diverse networks. If employees are

reluctant to tap into their personal networks, Coles suggests tying successful recruiting tips to bonuses for employees (Feloni, 2018, p. 1). The monetary bonus can provide motivation to employees. It also recognizes employees who are dedicated to improving the diversity of the workforce.

Building a recruitment network and visiting academic institutions are not the only ways to source diverse candidates. According to Goldberg (n.d.), "minority job fairs and media that are targeted at particular racial or ethnic groups are practical ways for organizations to convey the message that they are actively seeking minority candidates" (p. 4). Most industries have professional groups dedicated to supporting minority employees. For example, the National Society of Blacks in Computing is a professional group for computer scientists, who are black. These types of professional groups can be a great way to find more seasoned candidates. With the advancements in technology, reaching out to these types of professional groups has never been easier. While many groups participate in recruiting conferences or job fairs, they also have great social media presence. Reaching out to candidates or posting a link to a job can easily be done in virtual groups on websites like Facebook or LinkedIn. These sites are also free, which makes it a quick and inexpensive method for sourcing diverse candidates. It's important to note, being actively engaged in these types of professional groups will likely yield more success than just posting a link to a job and waiting for a response. Once again, there is an advantage to cultivating a relationship.

Despite the number of sourcing methods available to employers, it can sometimes still be difficult to source candidates of specific backgrounds. For example, Dr. Patty Lopez, a Latina computer scientist and advocate for diversity in STEM, states, "looking at population demographics, we see large percentages of women and minorities that are present in the overall

population, but largely absent in the STEM workplace" (Carter, 2017, p. 1). Given the limited number of women and minorities pursuing STEM careers, it can be difficult for organizations to increase the diversity of their workplace. Fortunately, there are a number of efforts aimed at increasing the percentage of women and minorities in STEM. For example, there are scholarships available to these demographics, as well as, state and government funded programs aimed at increasing the number of women and minorities entering the STEM field.

While there are efforts being used to increase diversity in the STEM field, there is not as much interest in other industries or among certain demographics. The STEM field is incredibly lucrative and that profitability allows STEM companies to divert resources to improving diversity, because it can make them even more profitable. Furthermore, in an effort to decrease wage gaps, it's in the state and federal government's best interests to fund research and programs aimed at improving diversity in STEM. On the other hand, industries that are not profitable receive no such funding, so finding diverse candidates is still difficult. For example, in the education field, there is a shocking lack of Asian and male teachers, but nobody seems interested in improving this lack of diversity, despite the clear and positive effects of a diverse workforce. According to Liana Loewus (2017) of Education Week, males only account for 23 percent of teachers, while Asians are stuck at 2 percent, which is far below their representation in the general population. Given the lack of resources in the field of education, and the lack of government sponsored programs to improve diversity in education, it is unlikely these percentages will improve in the near future. In certain industries, organizations need to accept that despite their best efforts, it may not be possible to source diverse candidates, because they don't exist.

Attracting Diverse Talent

The most important thing an organization can do to make itself attractive to diverse talent is demonstrate that it supports diversity. This means organizations need to both support diversity and their diverse workforce, as well as, market that support to potential candidates.

One of the first impressions an organization makes on candidates is through their job description. While the main purpose of a job description is to inform candidates about a given position, it can have other unforeseen impacts as well. According to Elizabeth Ames, Senior Vice President of Programs, Marketing & Alliances at Anitab.org, "companies need to be conscious of the way they craft job descriptions and include inclusive words that appeal to more non-traditional candidates (Bradford, 2018, p. 1). Inclusive words are essentially words that have no bias attached to them. According to Laurence Bradford, a contributor to Forbes.com, words like competitive and dominate are typically seen as masculine, whereas, words like supportive are seen as feminine (Bradford, 2018, p. 1). While the impact of these gender coded words may seem subtle, they can still have an impact. According to Bradford (2018), "diverse candidates, and particularly women, may be self-selected out before they even apply, thanks to job ads with gender-bias wording (p. 1). When developing job descriptions, it can be good practice to have a diverse team of people read over the job description to ensure it contains no bias wording or phrases. This small change should prevent some candidates from self-selecting out and can make an organization seem more inclusive.

After reviewing a job description, many candidates will visit the organization's website to better understand the culture of the workplace. According to Goldberg (n.d.), there are four attributes of an organization's website that can affect a candidate's intention to apply, including: ease of use, usefulness, the presence of a diversity statement, and the ability to interact with the

site in a personalized way (p. 3). These attributes can impact all candidates, however, the effect is significantly stronger for black applicants as compared to white applicants. (Goldberg, n.d., p. 3). Diverse candidates are, in many ways, like any other candidate. They respond positively to interacting with a website that is easy to use, has useful information, and gives them a personalized experience. The presence of a diversity statement also demonstrates that the organization's culture is supportive of diversity and inclusion, which is very attractive to diverse candidates.

Some organizations utilize advertisements, such as, commercials, brochures, and billboards to promote their workplaces and attract candidates. Research shows that black and Hispanic candidates are more attracted to organizations that represent minorities in their advertisements (Goldberg, n.d., p. 3). Demonstrating representation in advertisements can signal to minority candidates that there are already diverse people working there, which sends the message that they will not be a token minority. Specifically, for black applicants, research showed that they had no preference towards organizations that had black workers in an advertisement, unless, the employees were supervisors (Goldberg, n.d., p. 3). This preference for black supervisors, as compared to black workers exists for good reason.

Depictions of diverse employees in positions of supervision show that there is upward mobility at an organization for people of color or women. For example, if an organization has a lot of employees who are female or people of color, but they are all in entry level positions, while all management and supervisory positions are filled by white men, it can demonstrate that the organization is bias. People are more inclined to work somewhere if they feel there is a possibility that they can advance their career.

Another important moment in the hiring process is the interview. While the purpose of an interview is to give the organization an opportunity to get to know the candidate, the interview also impacts a candidate's perception of the organization. According to Goldberg (n.d.), "research indicates that black job seekers had more favorable impressions of organizations, where they were interviewed by black recruiters (p. 4). The interview is another opportunity for organizations to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and show that they are comfortable employing a diverse workforce. Once again, diverse candidates want to see people of their background already represented at the organization.

Retaining Diverse Talent

The focus of sourcing diverse candidates is knowing how to find diverse talent, while attracting diverse candidates is focused on ensuring they will apply to and accept the job. Retaining diverse talent is all about creating a work environment, where the work culture is supportive of diversity and employees enjoy working there. Fortunately, practices that increase the retention of diverse talent should also be things that attract candidates.

One of the most important things an organization can do to improve retention among its diverse employees is create and enforce a diversity policy that demonstrates their commitment to diversity and inclusion. According to Zeynep Ilgaz (2015), a contributor to Forbes.com, "organizations that don't take a companywide approach to diversity will have an awfully difficult time retaining whatever diversity they currently have" (p. 1). A companywide diversity policy should be the first step in creating an inclusive culture. It simultaneously sends the message to diverse candidates that they are supported, while letting employees who are not onboard know that intolerance will not be permitted.

After developing a diversity policy, it is important that the organization actually take actions to support the policy. According to Maynard Webb (2017), another Forbes contributor, organizations should consider developing an internal task force, made up of employees committed to diversity, that meets monthly to research best practices regarding to diversity and inclusion and empower them to implement those practices (p. 1). An internal task force reinforces the commitment to diversity, brings new and inclusive ideas to the organization, and empowers employees, which are all things that can improve employee retention.

Managers can have a large impact on employee retention as well. One thing managers can do to improve the retention of diverse candidates is solicit their feedback and have them share what they think can be done better (Webb, 2015, p. 1). Sharing honest feedback with a manager can be scary for employees, especially if they are in the minority at their workplace, so it's important that managers ensure they make their employees feel comfortable with the thought of sharing their honest opinion. It's also important that managers listen to that feedback and respond to it with appropriate actions. If employees see their manager takes action on their feedback, they'll be more willing to share their thoughts in the future and will appreciate having their voice heard, another important factor for improving retention.

Another practice managers can use to improve the retention of their diverse talent is engage in ongoing diversity training. According to Goldberg (n.d.), training aimed at helping managers understand the pervasiveness of stereotypes can be particularly useful (p. 5). Many managers rely on stereotypes, which can be harmful to the work environment. Being aware of this tendency and ensuring it doesn't happen, will help managers retain their diverse talent. If a manager recognizes that a number of employees are failing to utilize inclusive behaviors, it may be beneficial to invite all employees to a diversity training.

From an HR standpoint, there are certain actions they can take to improve inclusion at the workplace, which in turn, will improve retention of diverse employees. For example, "tying manager pay to the achievement of diversity goals is an effective means of keeping managers focused on those goals" (Goldberg, n.d., p. 5). A diversity policy may not be enough from HR to ensure that managers devote time and effort to diversity, however, a monetary incentive should ensure that happens. This practice can improve retention in two ways. First, it should improve manager's support of diversity practice. Second, it sends the message to diverse talent that the HR department is supportive of diversity and inclusion.

Overall, these practices should improve diversity and inclusion in a workplace, thereby improving retention of diverse talent as well. Most importantly, an organization that supports diversity does so throughout. It is not enough for only a small group to be supportive, but needs to be a part of the entire organization's culture.

Conclusion

Diversity in the workplace has become an important trend in the human resources field as organizations continue to recognize the profitability associated with it. As organizations continue to expand the diversity of their workforce, they need to be able to correctly define what a diverse team looks like. As previously mentioned, diversity can take many forms and organizations need to recognize the added value brought by people of various backgrounds. For an organization to successfully increase its diversity, organizations need to fully adopt a mindset that supports diversity. If organizations fail to adopt this mindset, they may be able to initially recruit more diverse talent, but will struggle to retain it. Organizations also need to recognize that the goal of building a diverse team is to build the most productive team possible, not just the most diverse team.

When adopting the best practices shared in this paper, it is important for organizations to utilize the methods that will work best for them. It is important to remember that one of the greatest assets an organization has is the diverse talent already employed. Diverse workers can be a great resource in determining which practices will be most successful in the sourcing and attracting of new diverse talent. Furthermore, these employees can also provide useful feedback for retention strategies.

While the best practices shared in this paper are focused on improving sourcing, attracting, and retaining diverse talent, many of these practices can be used on all talent, regardless of their background. Organizations that fail to adopt these practices may find themselves alienating not only their diverse candidates, but all of their candidates.

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