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How Relevant is **Diversity** To Agency Recruitment?

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Diversity management refers to the “systematic and planned commitment by organizations to recruit, retain, and promote a heterogeneous mix of employees in order to increase productivity, competitiveness and harmony in the workplace” (Charles, 2003). The population of minorities in the United States is growing everyday. With this growth comes the challenge of recruiting skilled workers within those ethnic and racial groups. In the past, Affirmative Action and other reforms were the primary measures of ensuring diversity in the workforce; however, pioneer of diversity management theory R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. states:

Managing diversity will, in the long term, make affirmative action unnecessary...managing diversity may make people more receptive to affirmative action, primarily because it suggests that there is an end to the tunnel.

In her article “Diversity Management: An Explanation Assessment of Minority Group Representation in State Government,” Joann Charles says there is an obvious link between diversity management and affirmative action—new ideas of diverse management were created from the affirmative action movement. Public agencies needed to be more inclusive in a continuously changing political and social environment. Research revealed innovation and creativity in the workplace are a result of capitalizing on a diverse workforce.

When searching for motivated, committed and productive employees, Charles strongly recommends more than one ethnic group should be explored. This is important if public organizations are going to turn diversity strategies from the legal requirements of affirmative actions to managing diversely. The end result is the workforce is utilized, and a larger range of constituents are represented.

In response to the call for diversity, the “diversity model” began to emerge in the late 1980s and became a hot topic in the 1990s. Experts agree the model’s intent is to fully and equitably utilize workers who come from different ethnic backgrounds. In the article, “A Twenty-First-Century Reception of Diversity in the Public Sector: A Case Study,” Vidu Soni says this model not only encourages organizations to actively recognize, accept, and value diversity in the workplace, but it also advances the philosophy that diversity is a desirable goal. Research indicates most bureaucracies have recognized the need for diversity and have actually implemented some incentives. Soni says these incentives (often called diversity management programs) usually incorporate the following targets:

- **Increasing sensitivity to cultural differences**
- **Developing the ability to recognize, accept, and value diversity**
- **Minimizing patterns of inequality experienced by women and minorities**
- **Improving cross-cultural interactions and interpersonal relationships among different gender and ethnic groups**
- **Modifying organizational culture and leadership practices**

If an organization is going to successfully use and implement these targets, the organization’s culture must be welcoming of such change. The change in diversity practices must come from the top down. Targets should be clear and show a link between diversity objectives and a diverse working environment. Soni points out that if employees and management are not on the same page, diversity management initiatives are likely to have a very slow or minimum success rate.

“It is necessary to build a workforce that is reflective of the ethic, gender, and racial composition of the community being served without compromising standards. When standards are lowered, everyone suffers, and no one suffers more than those who are hired despite their lack of qualifications. The first rule of recruitment, therefore, should always be that competence is the most important criteria.”

A case study was conducted in a federal agency to see where employees stood on the value of workplace diversity (Soni, 2000). The results strongly suggest an even greater need to continue the push for diversity incentives in the public sector. As suspected, those members of society which Affirmative Action originally sought to protect see greater value in diversity. Soni offers the following explanation for the case study results:

The minimal agreement between employee perceptions regarding the goals of an agency’s diversity-management initiatives and those described in the literature, in large part, may be attributable to a lack of understanding of what constitutes diversity, how it affects organizations, and why incentives to manage are needed.

Soni warns if ineffective diversity incentives are left unattended, the adverse effect could be decreased support of diversity as well as negative attitudes toward it. Ultimately, without the kinks worked out, diversity management could turn into a problem rather than an advantage. Although major strides to promote diversity in the public sector have been made on the federal level, state governments and public agencies should model their federal counterparts and incorporate practices that are favorable to diversity as well. It is very important for the public to see agencies with whom they have a lot of personal interaction with as equal and just.

Diversity and Law Enforcement Recruitment and Selection

In Management and Supervision of Law Enforcement Personnel, Dr. Donald Schroeder and Frank Lombardo’s views on what makes a law enforcement agency diverse mirror the overall views of Charles and Soni when looking at public service agencies in general; however, Schroeder and Lombardo specifically point out a law enforcement agency’s success in dealing with diverse communities starts with the recruitment and selection process:

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As stated before, changes to traditional demographics in agencies must come from the top down. In a nutshell, leadership is the ingredient which makes all the difference. Specifically for law enforcement agencies, Schroeder and Lambardo define leadership as “the ability to get work done with and through others, while simultaneously winning their respect, confidence, loyalty, and winning cooperation.” The authors note the most important message in the definition is that leadership requires more than just getting the job done. In respect to leadership and a diverse workforce, Schroeder and Lambardo report it is critically important that first line supervisors mirror the overall agenda of the agency’s head and therefore model the desired working relationship which produces a harmonious atmosphere in the workplace. Schroeder and Lambardo offer the following considerations for law enforcement managers, including those with diverse workforces:

- Listen carefully at all times
- Maintain an open door policy
- Be instructive
- Reprimand, when necessary
- Be supportive
- Be informative
- Accept all employee grievances
- Be consistent
- Seek input when making decisions

Diversity Action Plan

Variations in recruitment and selection practices among agencies are inevitable. A strategic plan should be developed and variations should be made to accommodate local factors and influences. Charles presents a strategic plan that public agencies can model to enhance the recruitment process while managing diversely at the same time:

- Create a selection process that can be viewed as nondiscriminatory and fair
- Design and place job advertisements to attract a diverse pool of applicants and raise awareness of job vacancies
- Initiate job fairs and internship opportunities
- Use current minority group employees as recruits

The Criminal Justice Institute uses the strategy of utilizing its current minority base within the organization to recruit minorities and women (Figure 1). This practice does not necessarily ensure more minorities will fill or even apply for the advertised positions; however, it is a proactive measure towards diversity.

Figure 1

From: Human Resource Director
To: CJI Personnel
Subject: Referrals

As a part of our affirmative action hiring process, a hiring department has the option of contacting individuals referred by minorities or women presently on our staff. We are utilizing this option for the (_____) position in the hopes of finding someone suitable for employment.

I have attached a copy of the advertisement and request that you forward to anyone you think might be interested. If you prefer, you can provide me with the name and phone number of a person you think would be suitable and I will contact them.

Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated.

How Relevant is Diversity in Recruitment?

A marriage between diversity and recruitment is a proactive step for law enforcement agencies—specifically those agencies who serve the public benefit when its workforce can identify with the population it services. Street level bureaucrats, namely law enforcement personnel, have a tremendous amount of contact with the public. Subsequently, effective recruitment and selection measures go hand in hand with ensuring agencies hire individuals from diverse backgrounds who make a positive impact in the law enforcement communities they protect and serve.

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