

Assessing and Enhancing the Diversity Climate

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Abstract

Establishing and maintaining an effective diversity climate in schools and districts is crucial to effective decision-making because of the multiple perspectives that are gained which result in a richer information base. Ultimately, students benefit from these enhanced decisions and the multitude of positive firsthand experiences they gain from a diverse workforce. Effective employment practices are essential in creating a diversified workforce, as are practices for employee recognition, evaluation, and advancement. Human resources practices should be reflective of merit and objectivity, serving as cornerstones of how employees are viewed and treated. Most importantly, a meaningful diversity climate is indicative of employees perceiving that their perspectives on issues and contributions are considered and recognized. The Diversity Assessment Instrument will aide school and district employees in defining the diversity climate and establishing reference points for enhancing that climate.

Keywords: diversity climate, merit, objectivity, and decision-making

Context

Occasionally school administrators need to assess the *diversity climate* in their school or district. This is especially critical today as people throughout the U.S. continue to struggle with diversity issues regarding factors such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. By objectively collecting the perceptions of staff and other stakeholders through the Diversity Assessment Instrument, insights will be gained to deal more effectively with diversity issues. The results obtained from the Diversity Assessment Instrument will provide information needed to enhance the diversity climate of the school or district.

What is Diversity?¹

In the broadest sense, diversity means putting aside biases and individuals working objectively and effectively together with others they may view as “different” for whatever reasons. Workplace diversity is represented by all human resource management and development practices striving to be free of biases for categories such as race, color, national origin, gender, sexual identity, and disabilities. Such diversity means “understanding that there are differences among employees and these differences, if properly managed, are an asset to work being done more

efficiently and effectively” (Bartz, Hillman, Lehrer, & Mayhugh, 1990, p. 321). Deven (2016) articulates the importance of *inclusion’s* utilization in the context of diversity when he states, “*Inclusion* is the purposeful practice of encouraging different viewpoints and creating an environment in which everyone feels accepted and contributes fully” (p. 56). Deven further adds that “diversity means inviting a mix of people to the party; inclusion means everyone dances together” (p. 56).

Adams (2018) observes that “unconscious bias and structural bias based on peoples social class, immigration status, gender, ethnicity and other factors impede a fair system for all” (p. 28). Walker (2018) supports this contention when he notes, “that white males hold a disproportionate share of the top jobs in business and government” (p. B6). Workplace diversity combats biases by hiring and then being inclusive of employees from various groups and perspectives to authentically and meaningfully involve them in decision-making processes (Bartz & Rice, 2017).

Objectivity refers to school administrators gaining insights from various staff as an information base for generating solutions to problems and making quality decisions. It includes judging people based on factual information and the merits of their work. It stresses hard data (factual) as a component in decision making. Objectivity also incorporates the evidence-based approach to decision making.

Diversity – Managing It²

“Workforce diversity means creating an inclusive environment that accepts each individual’s differences, embraces their strengths, and provides opportunity for all staff to achieve their full potential” (Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland, 2013, p. 1).

Human resource management practices that result in a mix of employees on factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender are a basic, but important, starting point. However, diversity involves more than these three factors and should consider other characteristics such as educational background and related experiences, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, and geographical experiences (Brookins, 2017). As Gaul (2016) notes, “the concept of diversity and inclusion is also inherent to an organization thinking differently. Having employees with different backgrounds will naturally go to varying viewpoints” (p. 48).

Even if a considerable number of the previously mentioned characteristics are not achieved to attain a desirable mix, meaningful diversity can occur among existing employees. Guiding principles for effectively utilizing workforce diversity are:

- understanding that there are differences among employees and these differences, if properly managed, are an asset to work being done more efficiently and effectively;
- understanding that differences among employees create a more diversified workforce with a broader range of perspective attributes;
- capturing the richness of differences of employees and utilizing these differences for their betterment, resulting in more effective decisions that improve student learning at the school and district levels;
- understanding that people are different and if properly nurtured and cultivated, these differences are a positive force;
- striving to create a work climate that is heterogeneous and utilizes maximum participation of all individuals to their full potential; and

- demonstrating mutual respect, acceptance of others, and the desire to work for the common good of students, at the school and district levels (Bartz & Rice, 2017).

Diversity nurtures creativity and innovative ideas (Thiederman, 2008). It improves morale and job satisfaction and prompts employees to feel ownership in their school and district (Bartz, et al., 1990). Diversity creates an inclusive climate that effectively assimilates staff that are not part of the dominant group in the work environment. It nurtures a climate in which the opportunity for experiencing social capital is enhanced and fosters the development of new skills for employees. When these new skills are internalized and applied, human capital is expanded to the benefit of the employees, students, and the school and district.

The Diversity Assessment Instrument³

The Diversity Assessment Instrument (See Appendix) is designed to document the perceptions of employees at a given point in time to serve as an indicator of a school's or district's diversity climate. Administrators may not want to use all the items in the Diversity Assessment Instrument because they can objectively justify that some items are not applicable to their situation. It is crucial, though, to make certain that an item is not excluded because of a bias, a perception that undesirable results may occur, or that an item might cause some respondents to feel "uncomfortable." The point is that local administrators may need to modify the Diversity Assessment Instrument to fit the parameters of their particular situation so that the results truly and credibly assess the status of the diversity in the local context.

Administrators may want to add a demographic key after the final item for analyzing the results by gender, race, or other relevant subgroups. If this is done, it is imperative that no individual's results can be identified. Further, if a subgroup is small (e.g., fewer than five), strong consideration should be given to *not* reporting these results.

While some items clearly have a desirable rating, others are left largely to the interpretation of what the results mean in the local context. Several major themes of the Diversity Assessment Instrument are that: (1) people should be judged on merit, (2) decisions should be made objectively when dealing with people, (3) personal preferences and attributes sometimes cloud merit and objectivity, (4) a diversified workforce is a more effective workforce, and (5) more effective decisions are made when soliciting and utilizing the input of various subgroups representative of the workforce. The results from administering the Diversity Assessment Instrument should be used as reference points for discussions inclusive of all employees regarding the positive aspects of the present diversity climate and how to enhance it.

Conclusion

Human resource practices are at the heart of creating a meaningful diversity climate in a school and district. In addition to hiring practices, encouraging and structuring decision making that fosters input from all subgroups is crucial in utilizing the strengths of a diversified employee base. Fairness, objectivity, and merit are essential elements of establishing and maintaining an effective diversity climate. Utilizing the Diversity Assessment Instrument is an effective means of

gaining insights from employees and other stakeholders regarding the present diversity climate and serving as reference points for discussions concerning enhancing diversity.

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Footnotes

¹Based in part on:

Bartz, D. E. (2018, January). Bias—The enemy of diversity and objectivity for educational leaders. *American International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(1), 1-7.

²Based in part on:

Bartz, D. E. & Rice, P. (2017). Integrating diversity with effective group processes and mindset for more productive teams, committees, task forces, and PLCs. *National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal*, 14(1), 1-5.

³The Diversity Assessment Instrument is based, in part, on:

Burrell, L. (2016, July-August). We just can't handle diversity: A research roundup. *Harvard Business Review*, 71-74.

Dobbin, F. (2016, July-August). Why diversity programs fail and what works better. *Harvard Business Review*, 52-60.

Harvard Business Review. (2016, July-August). Designing a bias-free organization. *Harvard Business Review*, 63-67.

The author takes a broader approach to diversity climate than these sources and also used his 50 years of experience in developing the Diversity Assessment Instrument.

Appendix

Diversity Assessment Instrument

Directions: Please read each item carefully before responding. Do not respond to an item if you have insufficient information. You *will not* be asked to share your responses with anyone. Circle your answers. Thank you!

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) A diverse workforce measurably improves decision making, problem solving, creativity, innovation, flexibility, and is overall beneficial.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2) Most educators believe that hiring, professional development opportunities, and recognition for a job well done should come down to who really is deserving (merit).	SA	A	U	D	SD
3) Emphasizing diversity can diminish who deserves recognition based on the actual merits of people's performance on the job.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4) I know individuals who are prospective outstanding and talented educators when I see them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5) I do—or could—evaluate people fairly and objectively.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6) Teacher evaluation where I work is conducted fairly and objectively.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7) When the principal or superintendent proclaims a commitment to fairness with respect to how people are treated, stereotypes can still cause them to evaluate and treat people differently even though these people perform as well as others do.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8) Chance events play a large role in people's careers and success in their professional lives.	SA	A	U	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9) People who attain excellent jobs in education and have high salaries are evidence of how smart they are and how hard they have worked.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10) While people who wanted to move up into administration (and did not)—and then possibly advance within the administrative ranks—may have caught a bad break here and there, they could have caused things to be more favorable to them if they had worked harder and “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps.”	SA	A	U	D	SD
11) Superintendents basically feel things are fair and just in their districts regarding diversity issues.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12) Merit—what people actually accomplish on the job—should be used to judge employees’ contributions and worth to the school and district.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13) Teachers who move into administration and attain good positions are evidence of how smart they are, how hard they have worked, and how outstandingly they have performed.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14) Good fortune, as opposed to merit and hard work, accounts for a great deal of success in life.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15) Our present points of reference and “lot in life” shape how we perceive the haves and have-nots in the broader world.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16) Random events have a lot to do with how a person does professionally.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17) In a teacher evaluation system, the highest possible scores (rewards) are likely to be concentrated in the hands of those teachers who actually are the top performers.	SA	A	U	D	SD

SCHOOLING

8

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18) Based on the criteria in your teacher evaluation system, the highest scores will be given to those who most justly deserve them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19) Any recognition you have received professionally has been well-earned.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20) You have an accurate sense of your own professional skills and abilities.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21) You feel that you have overcome obstacles in your life to get where you are professionally today.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22) You have seen factors <i>not</i> based on merit, accomplishments, and/or effort used to give recognition to individuals in our profession.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23) Negative, racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes play a role in who gets hired, promoted, and/or recognized in our profession.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24) Stereotypes regarding women and minorities still play a role in who gets the highest evaluation ratings and other forms of recognition in our profession.	SA	A	U	D	SD
25) In our profession, “cultural fit” is considered when judging whether or not to interview and/or hire candidates for teaching positions.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26) If you were a superintendent in a virtually all white school district with no teachers of color, you would actively seek out minority candidates for teaching vacancies.	SA	A	U	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
27) When (or if) you are involved in the selection process for filling a teaching position, the personal chemistry between you and the candidate impacts your overall judgment of the candidate.	SA	A	U	D	SD
28) The principal(s), superintendent, and/or human resource personnel in your district do a good job of trying to recruit and hire people of color for teaching vacancies.	SA	A	U	D	SD
29) When (or if) you are involved in selecting a candidate to fill a teaching position, your general instincts regarding the qualities needed for effective teaching will be important in making your final judgment.	SA	A	U	D	SD
30) Job applicants with a background similar to yours and your beliefs may influence your judgment of them.	SA	A	U	D	SD
31) Job applicants from elite colleges and/or successful athletic backgrounds are likely to be effective teachers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
32) In selecting candidates for teaching positions, you believe that some people on selection committees may allow their biases to enter into how they evaluate candidates.	SA	A	U	D	SD
33) A part of workforce diversity means inclusion and valuing open participation by <i>all</i> staff members in order to gain a variety of perspectives on a given issue.	SA	A	U	D	SD
34) Diversity includes equitable hiring of individuals from various racial/ethnic groups and other groups who may sometimes be viewed by the general public as “different.”	SA	A	U	D	SD

SCHOOLING

10

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
35) In our profession, females from minority groups have a more difficult time securing administrative positions than other candidates.	SA	A	U	D	SD
36) In some situations, job candidates from racial/ethnic groups have an advantage with respect to being hired.	SA	A	U	D	SD
37) You being a member of a racial/ethnic group has sometimes been <i>an advantage</i> in an employment situation.	SA	A	U	D	SD
38) You being a member of a racial/ethnic group has sometimes been <i>a disadvantage</i> in an employment situation.	SA	A	U	D	SD
39) White males have an advantage over others for being promoted.	SA	A	U	D	SD
40) An invisible barrier (“glass ceiling”) still exists that prevents females and minorities from advancing to higher positions.	SA	A	U	D	SD
42) Diversity training should be mandatory for all school district employees.	SA	A	U	D	SD
43) When considering diversity, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQIs) need to be included.	SA	A	U	D	SD
44) In employing staff members, school superintendents recognize any inequities flowing from employment practices and take proper measures to correct them.	SA	A	U	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
45) Assuming diversity means:					
A) employing people from various racial, ethnic, and gender groups;					
B) intentionally seeking out perspectives of present employees based on the uniqueness of their backgrounds, when attempting to solve problems; and					
C) stressing that staff members focus on working effectively with people they may view as “different” for factors over which these individuals have control; you support diversity.	SA	A	U	D	SD
46) Diversity means taking actions to aggressively recruit teacher applicants of color.	SA	A	U	D	SD
47) Implementing diversity may prompt interpersonal conflicts among employees.	SA	A	U	D	SD
48) You have consciously tried to identify any biases you may have at work and address them in a constructive manner.	SA	A	U	D	SD
49) You have witnessed educators being negatively biased toward others in the work environment on the basis of religion.	SA	A	U	D	SD
50) School administrators are sometimes overconfident and, thus, make quick or almost automatic judgments in problem solving situations.	SA	A	U	D	SD
51) Most educators have a bias of some sort that is counterproductive, and it is the responsibility of the superintendent to establish practices that moderate these biases as opposed to trying to force total elimination of them.	SA	A	U	D	SD

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
52) The context and how information is presented by administrators for addressing possible biases of employees has a lot to do with how accepting employees are of the information and the likelihood of changing their behaviors.	SA	A	U	D	SD
53) Diversity improves performance for people who apply it, do good work, and treat others fairly.	SA	A	U	D	SD
54) When considering diversity, individuals with disabilities should be an included group.	SA	A	U	D	SD
55) When considering diversity, age via generational groups (Baby Boomers 1946-1965, Generation X 1966-1982, and Millennials 1983-2004) should be included.	SA	A	U	D	SD