Diversity Management

Reflection

Diversity Management relies on leadership competences within the organization. What competences would you enhance in the leadership trainings of your company, which is supposed to improve its diverse culture? Please develop a DLC-Framework ("Diversity Leadership Competences"-Framework).

In order to develop a Diversity Leadership Competencies Framework we have to take a look at what a competency model is and why it is so important to look at competencies and not just cognitive intelligence.

A competency model is a descriptive tool that identifies the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviour needed to perform effectively in an organization (A.D. Lucia and R. Lepsinger, 1999). Designed to help an organization meet its strategic objectives through building human resources capability, competency modelling has been in existence since the 1970s, starting with the first models created by David McClelland. McClelland (1973) showed that competencies would be better able to predict important behaviours than would more traditional cognitive intelligence tests.

Diversity in groups and teams is often seen as a positive force leading to effective functioning of the team. Diversity supposedly leads to greater variance in ideas, creativity, and innovation, thus generating better group performance (Cox, 1993; Jackson, May and Whitney, 1995). Diversity is almost always regarded synonymous with gender or ethnic diversity. Age, cultural background, ability / disability, sexual orientation, religion and class are also dimensions needed to take into consideration. It is very important to understand that diversity can be managed on an organizational level as well as on an individual level.

Developing a DLC Framework should take into consideration all the factors seen in the competency models like knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviour in regard to the diversity dimensions. Derived from Taylor Cox (1997), building diversity...
competency is not acquiring a list of skills. It’s rather a development process of learning:

**Awareness:**

Leaders should be aware that diversity has genuine effects on organizational behaviour and work outcomes. But awareness is a very basic precondition. I think it’s often the case that managers think a specific dimension is irrelevant and has no influence. A very common example is communication between genders. Managers (also in my company) are not aware that gender affects communication.

As diversity can be managed on different levels, the part of raising awareness can be supported also on an organisational level. Introduction videos for new employees, internal company newspaper, policies and signs as well as other measures will support this.

**Understanding**

Once the awareness is there the way is clear to create understanding. This is done through the acquisition of knowledge. The leader should know to what extend gender affects communication and why this could lead to a possible increase or decrease in performance figures. I think the best way to teach this understanding is to let the managers bring in their own experience and analyse them in a group. Maybe there was a recent incident in the company, which could also be analysed.

**Changing behaviour, taking action**

Once the awareness (motivation) and understanding (knowledge helping to determine the change needed) is built, leaders should be positioned to take action and change behaviour. It is possible that once managers decide to take action on a particular diversity related problem, they will build awareness of a different not necessarily related problem.

**Research question**

Swiss companies focus in their Diversity Policies on improvement of gender and age Diversity in the organisation. A Hospital wants to build up organisational competencies in ethnicity and cultural diversity. What does literature recommend? Of course, hospitals can also learn from other business fields, which maybe have developed best practice in cultural Diversity.

Culture can be described as the interplay of many elements which including behaviours, customs, beliefs, values and institutions (Mays, Siantz and Viehweg 2002). Culture is sometimes described as a lens through which we view the world, meaning that one’s culture influences their perceptions and interactions in everyday life. A few of the
dimensions of difference between cultures are apparent when considering different ways of understanding time, hierarchy, health, collectivism and individualism. Importantly though, while culture influences human interactions it must be viewed as dynamic rather than static. That is to say, culture changes over time and members of a particular culture or ethnicity will not always think and act in ways, which are consistent with their cultural background (Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria Inc., 2006).

Culturally competent organisations have to manage diversity on an organizational level as well as on an individual level. It could be a reflection in the philosophy, mission statement, in introduced policies, structures, procedures and practices. But also a diverse knowledgeable and skilled workforce and a dedication to community engagement could be used to promote cultural awareness on an organisational level.

For the individual the process of cultural competence involves becoming culturally aware, gaining cultural knowledge and achieving cultural skills (Mays, Siantz & Viehweg 2002). It can be defined as the ability to identify and challenge one’s own cultural assumptions, one’s values and beliefs. It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another’s eyes, or at the very least, to recognise that others may view the world through different cultural lenses (Fitzgerald 2000 cited in Stewart 2006).

But the question arises how can cultural competence be measured? I think no explicit criteria have yet been established to assess the achievement of cultural competence. Steward (2006) suggests that perhaps the most useful way of assessing organisational cultural competence is by measuring performance against a set of agreed standards. Standards could either be mandatory enforced, recommended guidelines or recommendations for voluntary adoption.

Such standards could be: cross-cultural training offered to all new employees within an organisation as part of the induction program or the distribution of a discussion paper on diversity which outlines practical ways of supporting health services to be culturally appropriate (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2005).
References


