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A Diversity Initiative is Organizational Development: Anything Else is Just Window Dressing

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Abstract

When an organization, any organization, but in particular, higher education, decides to engage in a diversity initiative, the leadership of the institution must be aware that they are engaging in a complex change or organization development. Organization Development is defined as change initiated by the top leadership of an organization, the change must be organization-wide, it is planned; it is designed to improve organizational health and effectiveness, and is implemented with the assistance of skills and interventions based in the behavioral sciences.

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This paper was inspired by a presentation by Rupert Nascote from North Carolina State University titled "Creating a Diversity Movement in the University."[1] Dr Nascote, based on the experience of his university, advanced a model that included the university addressing the following points in developing a diversity movement: its' philosophy of responsibility, definitional issues, action and activities at different organizational levels, visibility and purpose. A well-defined process, as described by Dr. Nascote, is essential, however, it is missing a few steps typically used by business organizations, for creating change in organizations. Such a process is called organization development.

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Characteristics of Organizational Development as outlined in Figure 1, will be explored and the implications of beginning a diversity initiative based on an OD model. One of the primary ways that organizational development is conducted is through action research. Action Research involves situation identification, a consultant who has been trained and has experience in organizational behavior and analysis, requires data-gathering and preliminary diagnosis and relies on experienced-based learning by members of the organization. Once data are collected and analyzed, a feedback session to organizational members occurs. This process allows for the joint assessment of the status of the organization and its readiness to engage in a diversity initiative. An action plan is developed with the participation of organizational members and implemented based on the data gathered. An evaluation of the action plan should occur at specific intervals during the implementation process to allow for adjustments and to acknowledge

successes.

Finally, when engaging in a diversity initiative, it would be important to hire a qualified candidate, using a deliberate process. This paper will address the key points that would be important to consider in beginning the hiring process. Although one might conclude that a formal position has been created, it is often an error organizations make by not establishing a special position and conducting a national search. Too often, someone, usually passionate about social justice, who is currently employed by the university, fills the post. There are positives and hindrances to this approach that will be addressed during this presentation. In addition, a series of questions will be proposed, along with potential responses that could be provided by a highly qualified candidate. The candidate begins the interview process by educating the organization about organization development and the process of change, which is as much what a diversity initiative is as any thing else.

This presentation will address two levels of system in creating a diversity initiative, the individual, and the total organization. The questions outlined below will serve as the framework for developing clarity for both individuals and organizations about the initiation of a diversity program for large-scale implementation.

1. What is your philosophy about implementing a diversity initiative in a higher education institution? (Individual and organization)
2. Discuss how would you implement a diversity initiative at this institution? (Individual and institution notions about this process)
3. Identify the potential challenges and how you would address them. (Individually and institutionally)
4. What previous experience do you have working with diversity? (Individually and institutionally.

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Figure 1
Characteristics of Organization Development

Planned program involving the entire organization

The top of the organization is aware of and is committed to the program

The change is related to the mission

Long-term effort

Activities are action oriented

Focused on changing attitudes or behaviors

Occurs primarily with groups

Presenter
Carole G. Parker, Ph.D., is a member of the Department of Business Management,
College of Business at Frostburg State University. She is responsible for teaching
leadership in the MBA Program in three locations. In addition, she also teaches
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Dr. Parker has over seventeen years of experience as a manager, facilitator, and teacher in
health care systems, human service agencies, and business and industry. Consulting
activities have included increasing managerial effectiveness in managing differences and
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relationships, the management of differences, and merger integration.

Among the organizations for which Dr. Parker has served as consultant or trainer are
such firms as General Electric Co., General Motors Corporation, Touche Ross, Canada,
University Hospitals of Cleveland, EG&G Idaho, Inc., Mt. Sinai Medical Center, and
Evangelical Health Systems.

Dr. Parker has taught at The University of Thai Chamber of Commerce, Illinois
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served as a member of the Visiting Staff of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, and is a
member of NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science. She has lectured and presented
on the topic of managing differences in the U.s., Canada, Thailand, and Belgium.

A graduate of Morgan State University in Baltimore, Dr. Parker earned her Masters in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh, and her Ph.D. in Organization Development and Analysis from Case Western Reserve University in

[1]Nascote, Rupert W. "Creating a diversity movement in the university." Conference Proceeding, Sixth Annual National Conference People of Color in Predominately White Institutions pp 50-51. November 2001