



Keeping Diversity and Inclusion Programs Moving Ahead

Putting a diversity and inclusion program in place and reporting benchmarked results does not guarantee progress. Results must be connected to improved strategizing and decision-making.

Sometimes, even the best intentions lead to sluggish results. In a common scenario, corporations with seemingly unlimited funds announce diversity and inclusion programs with great fanfare, followed by a big push to educate the workforce and attract diverse job candidates. Everything rolls along quite nicely for a while, until the momentum begins to wane. Eventually the results can only be called disappointing and the entire program stalls. However, no one really seems to be quite sure what has gone wrong.

Any business initiative can stall and that is true for diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs. Though benchmarking is critical to program measurement, an organization must be able to assess the measurements that have real value to diversity expansion and have a process in place that sets priorities, goals and accountability to keep the program on track. Diversity programs can stall due to a number of obstacles that include waning financial support for diversity departments or a lack of executive enthusiasm that trickles down through the organization. To succeed, diversity and inclusion programs must be treated as seriously as any other business program.

Outcomes Should Accelerate Performance Drivers

Successful diversity programs implement methods for benchmarking and assessment of the program's impact on organizational performance. However, the benchmarking and assessment process should also be enhanced by addressing progress. Instead of just determining the financial impact of the diversity program on the bottom line, it is also important to review the program in terms of whether the program is making progress towards strategic goals. Publishing statistics may be helpful, but the statistics have more meaning when viewed in terms of progress towards pre-defined goals. Statistics must be supplemented by other action oriented efforts or there is always the danger of the diversity manager becoming the equivalent of the lone wolf crying in the desert. Effective tracking and assessment tools will combine outcome measures and performance drivers.¹

For example, the Cardinal Health Women's benchmarks and sets goals, but it does not rely only on the D&I team to track program progress. The organization established an executive steering committee to set priorities for a larger steering committee that oversees its Women's Initiative Network (WIN). An annual survey of needs is completed and WIN chapters at various company locations ensure that resources and efforts are used in a way that meets the prioritized needs. Other evaluators besides the supplier diversity managers or directors are ensuring and verifying the program stays on track. Outcome measures (i.e. financial) are blended with performance drivers (i.e. steering committee priorities).

There are a number of key tools that are used to ensure D&I programs stay on track. The approach a company takes depends on the industry, business culture and ultimate goals. Alaska Air Group made a decision to move towards a more advanced stage in its diversity and inclusion program, while



maintaining high performance. It chose the Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks (GDIB) tool developed by an expert group specializing in worldwide D&I standards.

GDIB looks at global D&I best practices through frameworks that include multiculturalism, diversity management, social justice, compliance and representation, and social responsibility. The program measures progress towards best practices in 13 categories, indicating the stage of the D&I efforts and the robustness of its progress. It produces quantitative (recruitment, retention, employee complaints, supply chains, financial etc.) and qualitative information (attitudes, culture, etc.). Alaska Airlines used GDIB to move what it considered a lackluster D&I program forward to promote business success in a struggling economy. The benchmarking tool is available at no cost.²

Six Sigma is a well known program used to benchmark performance in various programs including supplier diversity. Six Sigma based commodity analysis of supplier diversity spending is used to set goals. These goals are then assigned to procurement managers, linking the program to larger organizational goals.

One of the benefits of joining the Women's Business Enterprise National Council is that the member gets access to the WBENC Balanced Scorecard which is a self-evaluation tool for measuring performance of supplier diversity initiatives in pursuit of excellence. WBENC members can also access the benchmarking of corporate supplier diversity programs and a wealth of research information.

Small to medium sized companies can adopt a simpler evaluation process. An evaluation template can be developed that has strategies and outcomes outlined and include information like measures, data collection methods, responsible people, benchmarks and timeframe and any other desired information. Collection of data will rely on the use of instruments like stakeholder surveys. Each instrument can address a particular topic like business culture of inclusion, career advancement opportunities, knowledge and learning, and on so on.

[Drilling Down to the Truth Promotes Progress](#)

There are several key points to keep in mind concerning the use of tools for benchmarking and measuring progress. Stalled D&I programs obviously do not have a feedback system in place. There is no tool in existence that is of benefit unless the information it provides is shared with decision makers and used to align strategies to keep the program moving. What is seldom discussed is that the people interpreting and reporting the evaluation results have enormous influence over program direction. That is one reason why Cardinal Health has a group outside the D&I department setting priorities which guides reporting expectations in terms of what is reported and to whom it is reported.

All too often, focus is place on creating and maintaining a program so a company can claim it is promoting. Drilling down to the facts reveals the truth as to whether the program is delivering results. Designing, evaluating and disseminating diversity program information is only part of the process. The evaluation needs to be used by management as a method for refining strategy and increasing accountability on an organization-wide basis. Patchwork programs are usually not successful because they stop at reporting. The benchmarking and evaluation needs to be aligned



with organizational goals and needs so that people are more likely to become engaged as a result of what is reported. Engagement can lead to further analysis, innovation and progress.

Diversity and inclusion has largely been a numbers game in the past, but that is rapidly changing with growing awareness of its importance to organizational success.