

Cultural competencies in the workplace – how to recruit and retain a diverse workforce

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Abstract

There are differences that exist between communities within the workforce. How can we create a link to bind them, while unifying and fostering greater inclusion? Treating employees holistically enables people to feel welcomed, appreciated, and valued. The culture of a company is a by-product of the community that is established beforehand. If the culture is positive and adaptable, then it will equate to better recruitment and retention. This paper will discuss the aspects of culture, how ethnicity weaves people together, and the varying levels to retention.

Key words: culture, ethnicity, retention

Do it for the culture

The examination of various quotes related to the idea of culture can explain what it is or what it's supposed to be. The closer a person examines those quotes the more it can become evident that culture can be a positive or a negative. It is important to understand this aspect because if an employer doesn't fully understand the culture of their business, they will not be able to adapt and fully change it when the time comes.

When culture is being measured, there are thin lines to consider. Appreciation vs. appropriation is one of the most important. Often this line becomes fluid. When this happens, the culture of a company becomes harder to control. Just because a culture exists doesn't mean that it's for all the people who exist within your company. Who exactly does your culture serve? And why? Phrases like "it's always been this way" are a reminder to those who work with you that you are fine with stagnation or even worse, erosion.

The definition of an ethnic group is: a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, and/or language. It is important to understand that people from various races, socio-economical backgrounds, religions and everything in between can create their own shared culture as a community. This community can then birth a shared ethnicity. For people who are minorities, their experiences may be two-sided. As a minority I've often had to ask myself two questions. Who am I? And, who am I in relation to others? When I feel like those questions have similar, if not identical, answers my workplace becomes much more than a 9 to 5 opportunity.

Recruit and retain

Recruiting people with a macro approach can look significantly different than recruiting people with a micro approach. If a recruiter doesn't know which way they are focusing, they run the risk of losing all potential diverse applicants.

Macro

The ability to successfully advertise to a large community is complicated. One of the greatest ways it can and probably will give us fits comes from the understanding that the community you are trying to reach isn't a monolith. That community may have a lot of descriptors about them that are commonalities, but that doesn't mean your job opportunity speaks to them all in the same way.

Micro

To hone in on a specific population allows us to critically think about the resources available. Though thinking too intensely about a specific population can force us into tunnel vision. One of the greatest keys to remember when working in a micro sense is to remember that what's good or possible for one population may not translate to others.

Macro and micro

There are times when recruiting a workforce takes a combination of approaches. Complacency is one of the cardinal sins I've witnessed when a company is actively recruiting new or existing members. Often companies believe that "if you build it they will come", when in fact, how can anyone "come" if they don't have the right directions? Too often companies have a "this or that" approach to job postings and recruiting when they need to have a more fluid approach of "this and that".

If you are attempting to recruit a diverse workforce, you must have a diverse lens when reviewing these applications. Once when I was tasked with reviewing the process for a search committee, the application clearly stated that the applicant must "write well." I immediately asked, what exactly does that mean? This was not an application for a job in literature or English. And the people on the committee were not strong writers themselves. It turned out that no one had a clear answer for what that was supposed to mean. In my opinion, that statement would almost inherently cause bias.

When possible, rethink how your interview process is facilitated as well. There should be a level of consistency to the process from the amount of questions, conditions of the interviews and communication between applicants and administration. In fact, a lack of communication has been one of the most critical issues for companies losing potential diverse candidates for their workforces. Either not being able to answer questions related to DEI topics or taking a long time to communicate where the company is with the hiring process. Even consistent check-ins with high level applicants could be beneficial. If a minoritized person is coming into a company and community that they may not naturally fit in with, communication is critical to help those folks feel a sense of security. To offset the hesitation coming from

potential culture shock for these applicants, it may take an added effort from a company through means like communication.

As a diversity, equity and inclusion professional, I usually have a natural suspicion as it relates to companies focusing on more diverse communities. Because in my field, a lot of the time that focus was created because of issues, infractions or something poor that has happened in their industry and/or company. This doesn't mean that this focus shouldn't be nurtured, however, when this is the case, the people who are being targeted become quotas or checkmarks instead of community members. To retain the people, you are hopefully bringing in that they need to be part of the community in a greater way than just a number in the hired category.

Conclusion – the how

The culture of the community should adapt to the people who are there today, not the ones who were there yesterday. Not only are new people going to come into your company but people who are still there are consistently evolving in various ways. "It's always been this way", or "it is what it is" are kryptonite to morale.

A good time can also be a long time

A star is going to eventually burn out, but it doesn't take away from how beautiful it looks while it's glowing. Burnout is almost an accepted fact for too many industries. I believe preventing burnout is the best way to deal with burnout. However, if burnout is considered an expectation, then what are companies doing to slow down the rate at which it happens, and what resources are in place to help our stars shine after it happens?

In nearly every job I've held as an adult, my supervisors and colleagues have reminded me and anyone else who would listen to a key component of retention. "People leave good jobs because of bad supervisors, but people stay in bad jobs because of good supervisors." I believe this notion to be accurate, though for some time I believed that sentiment was a bit flawed. Because why is "good" considered the standard? We can be far better than good, and if as a company you are already lagging, good will more than likely not be good enough.

Money isn't always the defining factor. If more money isn't something that can be considered, what else can be afforded to your team? The amenities provided by your company should be under constant evaluation. When employees feel cared for by entities outside of themselves, there is an inherent level of security that develops. If the security is strong enough, trust can develop. With trust, belief can be established. If your employees believe in you, money or the lack thereof can be negotiated for retention purposes.

No company will be able to retain their entire workforce – this isn't always a negative. The reputation of your company will not only come from current employees and customers, but also from past employees. Past employees may have the possibility of becoming future hires for your company. If your establishment is serving its employees in a holistic manner, then in some ways they are forever part of your infrastructure.

Reference

Dictionary.com, definitions for culture and ethnicity

