

Free essay about managing cultural diversity at xyz university

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Introduction

Since 1890, XYZ University has been educating children of the middle-class in this part of the US midwest. Originally founded as a normal school for the training of teachers, XYZ has expanded to a respected regional university with an array of undergraduate programs in the arts and sciences. Still proud of its teacher's college, XYZ also has a thriving business school, as well as a nationally recognized arts and theater division. Located in an area that remains relatively rural, XYZ is a source of vibrant public programming in arts and culture for the local populace. It also runs a substantial continuing education division that awards certificates for arts marketing, real estate sales, court reporting, veterinary assistant and sustainable agriculture.

The university attracts students from around the country and has seen the make up of its student body become increasingly diverse over the years. It has approximately 5, 000 full time students, of which 20 percent are classified as " multicultural" by the college. Its cadre of international students is small, but growing. About 10 percent of undergraduates are foreign nationals, most of whom are attracted by XYZ's business programs. Currently, students are not tracked by sexual orientation, but it is clear that the number of full-time undergraduates who identify as lgbtq is growing. Since the recent Supreme Court decision that found a constitutional right for same-sex marriage, more lgbtq students have come out and others are more open about their sexual orientation. While it may appear to be a stereotype to say that the university's well-known arts programs are attracting more lgbtq students, this is, in fact, the case. There are more lgbtq students

enrolled in XYZ's arts and cultural degree programs than any other department of the university.

Current Diversity Challenges at XYZU

Gender Identity and Expression

One area of multiculturalism that, until now, has not received much attention is gender identity and expression. This is distinct from sexual orientation in several important ways. While sexual orientation is focused on the object of one's affection—traditionally either males, females or both—gender identity is focused on one's subjective identification, or how a person feels about him- or herself. Gender identity, and its external expression in the form of behavior, speech and social interaction, is concerned with how a person feels about her- or himself, while sexual orientation is concerned with how a person feels about others (Human Rights Campaign, 2015).

Some students at XYZ identify with a gender that is not the same as the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Some reject the idea of a binary, either/or concept of gender, seeing gender identity as a continuum. Some claim androgyny. Others adopt alternative names for their gender, avoid the use of traditional pronouns and/or express themselves in ways that can be confusing to those who are unfamiliar with this aspect of diversity.

Lately there have been incidents on campus where misunderstandings related to gender expression led to open conflict among students and faculty. For example, a freshman woman new to campus encountered a person she believed was male in a women's bathroom of the arts building. She challenged the person's presence, offense was taken and the two ended

up screaming at one another in the hall outside a classroom. The altercation escalated to the point where other students and even a faculty member became involved. Both students have filed complaints with the university administration and one has opened a case with the state division of human rights. Although there have been one or two similar incidents in the past, none have assumed this level of difficulty or urgency. The university's student affairs and human resources departments need to address the full range of sexuality issues, devise constructive ways to prevent conflict, and educate the college's various stakeholders about gender identity concerns.

Religion

Until about 2010, the overwhelming majority of students, faculty and staff of XYZU identified themselves as Christian. Most of the remaining portion claimed no religion or identified as "spiritual." This began to change as the university promoted its programs to prospective students at national and global forums, and as the arts and culture degrees became better known. Additionally, religious diversity of the professional staff and faculty increased as the university recruited top talent from outside the region.

Currently, the university community supports a wide range of religious groups and activities, including Christian, Jewish and Muslim worship services at the campus interfaith center, Catholic masses in Spanish, Buddhist meditation sessions and celebrations of the Lunar New Year. There are also services at several local churches and a synagogue in a nearby town.

Many students, particularly local people who attend part-time, are committed, Evangelical Christians. For some in this group, taking a class with

students from diverse backgrounds may be their first experience interacting with people whose values and outlook not only differ from Christian precepts, but may oppose them. This is especially true around issues of sexual orientation and gender expression. The university administration is challenged to develop policies and practices that respect the beliefs of all its stakeholders while also accommodating diverse needs and points of view. This is the surest route to the continued growth, influence and effectiveness of XYZU.

Building an Inclusive Campus Culture

Both research and experience show that any change effort, particularly one that targets strongly held beliefs and emotional attachments to culture, religion and identity, must be a bottom up effort that is driven by commitment from a wide range of stakeholders (Kotter, 2015). While it is entirely true that the top management must champion the change, a top down effort that is devised in a closed room in the administration building is unlikely to succeed because the constituents will have no genuine stake in its success. A key challenge for the university is to find ways to represent the voices of its many stakeholder groups in the change process, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, donors and the surrounding community.

Context of the Change Process

The size and structure of the university, with its multiple lines of authority, complex mixture of department loyalties, academic obligations, regulatory requirements, and seasonal schedules makes planning and executing a

change strategy more complicated than is the case in many other organizations. Because of this level of complexity, the diversity challenge is best thought of as a process of cultural change, rather than a straightforward diversity management initiative. There are a number of plausible models for managing this type of culture change, yet no single approach is an optimum fit for the two, relatively new dimensions of diversity that are in conflict at present—religion and gender expression. As Arrendondo (1996) has pointed out, no single strategy or activity, used in isolation, is likely to constitute an adequate approach for managing diversity.

Much of the literature on diversity management focuses on racial and ethnic diversity in a workplace, where staff have clear reporting lines and there is an element of managerial control that is lacking in the context of a university environment. Beyond that, addressing issues of sexuality requires an openness about matters that many consider especially private, so creating an atmosphere of safety and trust is both paramount and difficult. While race and ethnicity are perceived by most people as givens, gender identity and expression is sometimes perceived as a choice. Religion, too, is considered a choice. This encourages judgmental behavior on the part of some, as well as the idea that equal treatment is, in reality, the granting of special rights to a favored sub-culture. Charges of political correctness come from one side and accusations of bigotry from the other. The diversity context is far from straightforward and the change process must take this into account.

Thus, the best approach for XYZU is to use a combination of models and theories, which together give promise of guiding a culture change toward a campus climate that evolves in stages, over time moving from conflict, to

tolerating differences, to actively valuing them. It is therefore prudent to design a staged process where change is allowed to evolve, rather than occurring all at once (Borwick, 2014). Changes that occur at a measured pace are more likely to become institutionalized than rapid change that overwhelms those who are fearful and resistant, and who will undo the changes at the first opportunity.

Theories of Diversity and Change

The recommended change process for XYZU draws heavily on the work of John Kotter (1996, 2015), who is widely regarded as the foremost authority on leading change, and incorporates the research of diversity scholar Ann Morrison (1992). In addition, the dimensions of diversity model developed by Loden and Rosner (1991) is critiqued through the lens of queer theory, as applied by Regine Bendl, Alexander Fleischmann and Christa Walenta (2008), then adapted to modify heteronormative discourse, which reinforces the outsider status of people who are LGBTQ.

Kotter

In his work with Fortune 1000 companies around the world, Kotter recommends an eight step change process, updated in 2015 from the original model that he presented in 1996. The stages are:

1. Create a sense of urgency.

It's essential to communicate why a culture change is needed and why it must happen now. This is probably best achieved as part of the visioning process.

2. Build a guiding coalition.

A designated group of individuals, preferably volunteers, who represent stakeholders from all parts of the university should be appointed to guide the change process and champion its validity.

3. Form a strategic vision.

The vision provides direction for the change effort and describes the idealized end results of the change process. There should be a mechanism for encouraging input to the vision from all segments of the university community.

4. Recruit a volunteer army.

The term “army” is probably best dropped in favor of a more neutral metaphor; however, the basic idea is sound. As many people as possible should be recruited and provided with tools and information to carry the change message throughout the university and involve as many individuals as possible in the effort. This corps of change boosters builds and helps sustain enthusiasm for the change.

5. Remove barriers to action.

This is likely to be a tough achievement in a university, where faculty tenure, labor unions, state accreditation boards and others may present barriers, intentional or not, to the change process. It may be more realistic to think of this step as negotiating around barriers, rather than removing them altogether.

6. Generate short-term wins.

It will be important for the Guiding Coalition to identify short-term goals that are achievable within specific time frames, probably a semester, so that people who are involved in some aspect of the change process feel their

efforts are successful. Publicizing these wins will be critical to maintaining interest and in successfully completing the next step.

7. Sustain momentum.

This is the point where many change efforts fail. A university initiative is especially vulnerable to stalling over the summer. One idea for serious consideration is to launch a diversity change newsletter and Facebook page to help keep people connected and energized about change during vacation breaks. A constant stream of news and updates reminds people about the change process and its purpose—to achieve the common, desired vision.

8. Institute change.

Finally, instituting change will be far less difficult if earlier stages are fully accomplished, such as mobilizing a volunteer corps and visibly celebrating short-term wins. Change becomes institutionalized over time, through constant reinforcement. The graduation turnover and annual entry of a new crop of students means that communication and behavior change will be imperative for ensuring that culture changes are passed on and embraced over the long term.

Morrison

Consider Kotter's steps together with the five stage process of putting diversity into action, suggested by Morrison (1992):

1. Identify the diversity problems in the organization by collecting relevant information.
2. Strengthen top management's commitment by getting them directly involved in the diversity effort.

3. Identify practices that fit the organization's issues and develop a strategy.
4. Measure progress toward diversity goals.
5. Set up an ongoing program to continue progress.

Morrison's stages are narrow and specific to increasing the diversity of a workforce, as opposed to changing an organization culture to embrace diversity. When Morrison conducted her research and proposed the five-step program, the focus was on attracting and retaining a diverse workforce in a company. Now things have changed. " Diversity can no longer just be about making the numbers, but rather how an organization treats its people authentically down to the roots of its business model" (Llopis, n. p.). To put it plainly, it is not enough to admit students and hire people who identify as lgbtq. XYZU must grapple with, and solve, practical problems such as binary-gender bathrooms.

Although Morrison's steps are more numbers-focused, they fit very well within Kotter's stages and are a necessary addition to his change process because they keep the change effort focused on diversity. Otherwise, XYZU risks going off course into a broad change effort that may not satisfy the immediate problem of culture clashes among two of its major constituencies — the lgbtq community and individuals who adhere to conservative religious beliefs.

Loden and Rosner

The dimensions of diversity wheel and the four layers model developed by Loden and Rosner (1991) provide useful tools for analysis and self-reflection yet, like Morrison's work, are somewhat dated at this point, given the

progress made over the past 20+ years. What were once unfamiliar concepts to many are now understood, at least to some extent, by many baby boomers and gen x'ers. The millennials (gen y) coming into the workforce today and the young adults of gen z who are now entering the university have grown up in a multicultural world, where an individual is exposed to cultural differences via technology, if not in real life. Many, if not most, of these younger people wonder why there is so much fuss about same-sex marriage, express genuine outrage at racial discrimination and worry far less about the morality of their neighbors than they do about climate change. They are quick to spot contradictions between what is said and what is done. These younger generations are ready to take cultural competence to the next level.

Bendl, Fleishman and Walenta

Bendl, Fleishman and Walenta (2008) examined the discourse used in diversity management through the lenses of queer theory and social identity construction. They found that diversity management discourse, including the work of Loden and Rosner, reproduces binary concepts of a fixed gender identity. This in turn positions heterosexuality and heterosexual behavior as the norm and also reinforces the conception of gender as determined by biology. This normative approach casts forms of difference in gender and sexuality as abnormal, even deviant. Clearly, this idea of normal/not normal is not conducive to developing cultural competency among the university's stakeholders, nor does it support the ultimate goal of creating a fully functioning multicultural campus. More varied ways of conceiving the ideas

of gender identity and expression must be included in XYZ's change planning.

Recommended Change Process for XYZU

1. Verify your understanding of current diversity problems.

Observations of human resources personnel, those who have witnessed culture clashes and the individuals involved were synthesized to create a snapshot of the present diversity climate on campus. This perception should be verified prior to creating a vision for change and setting change goals.

One way to do this is to pull a random sample of stakeholders from the University Records Office and send them a confidential survey via the secure university email system. The information gleaned from survey respondents can be supplemented with personal interviews of selected faculty and staff members to get their impressions of the college's current diversity issues.

2. Launch a university-wide visioning process early in the fall semester.

The process should be open to anyone who wishes to participate in a series of small group visioning sessions, designed by a change management professional and facilitated by student, staff and faculty volunteers. The visioning groups will be announced by the university president at the annual Convocation to kick off the new academic year. The visioning sessions will be scheduled at various times to accommodate busy schedules, with summaries of the discussions recorded on standard reporting forms. Members of the Guiding Coalition and student volunteers will review the vision group reports, create a draft vision statement, submit it to the university community for feedback, and then refine the draft into a final vision. The vision will be

completed by the end of the fall semester.

3. As part of the visioning process, recruit the volunteer change corps.

Organize volunteers into small action groups according to student residence halls, academic majors and student clubs. Provide training in group facilitation and invite their participation in events and workshops relative to the change initiative. Set up a special email list and intranet site for members of the change corps to keep them apprised of news and wins. Give them advance notice of achievements, access to training and other perks that confer insider status. This will increase their commitment to driving the change process.

4. Offer a series of teach-ins on the various dimensions of diversity.

Use the model developed by Loden & Rosner (1991), with discourse adaptations suggested by Bendl, Fleishman & Walenta (2008). Ask the students and faculty of the Teacher's College to design and facilitate these events. The purpose is to provide members of the university community with a better understanding of the various dimensions of diversity, appropriate terminology relative to the main groups on campus, and the value that each of those groups brings to the whole university. The issue of accepted terminology and language is especially relevant those who are unfamiliar with issues of gender identity and expression. Often, misunderstandings occur because someone is uninformed, rather than malicious. Stress the overarching rationale for the change initiative: to enable every member of the university community to be safe and respected in order to perform to their full potential, and to position XYZU to successfully compete for the best students, faculty and resources while delivering a superior educational

experience.

5. Execute a robust communications program about the change process.

Highlight the change process and its accomplishments and encourage reflection among readers. Communication vehicles should be available in a variety of formats, including printed hard copies as well as digital. This can be managed by the university Development and Communications division.

6. Connect the change process to events in the outside world.

Conservative Christians, Muslims, African-Americans, members of the lgbt community and some others have found themselves in the spotlight of late because of news and world events. These external situations often have little to do with a person's actual experience on campus, yet assumptions are made and impressions formed. With world events top of mind, comments can be made that are uninformed or misguided. On the other hand, people may lack knowledge of appropriate language or require information about an event, but are afraid to ask for fear of giving offense. This leads to talking around issues rather than addressing them openly, in a supported environment that is properly facilitated. Faculty should be encouraged to lead class discussions on topics such as same-sex marriage, police shootings and similar news stories so that students have a safe space for reflection and constructive dialogue.

7. Codify the changes into policy.

Based on findings from the teach-ins, reader responses to change communications, debriefing reports from faculty and feedback on the vision, develop written policies and procedures to guide respectful interactions on campus. Publicize these widely and encourage discussion. A good venue for

these conversations might be via talk call-in programs on the college radio station.

One example of a new practice is to have faculty invite students to share their preferred form of address and/or pronoun during the first session of a course. Students who don't wish to stand out or who identify with an obvious gender will remain silent, but if there are students for whom it is important to be addressed in a particular way, their wishes can be honored. Some colleges have already implemented such a practice successfully.

8. Make structural and physical changes where applicable.

The outstanding example here is universities that have adapted the function and labeling of a proportional number of campus bathrooms to be designated as "all genders." This leaves the choice of facility up to each individual user and avoids singling out any particular group.

9. Publish end of year reports on progress.

These periodic reports will remind the university community about the importance of the change process and highlight the successes achieved. They will be an important part of maintaining momentum and integrating diversity initiatives into the overall strategic vision of the university.

Conclusion

It is good news for XYZ University that its constituent communities are varied and diverse enough to experience the growing pains of becoming a fully multicultural campus. Were it otherwise, the college would be lost in the last century, and far less able to compete for the right people and resources needed to thrive in a global economy. The framework outlined above will

require time and attention to detail if it is to be properly carried out. Some people—important voices, perhaps—may challenge this extensive use of resources and question whether so much attention to diversity management is warranted. This is the point at which a discussion of strategy must ensue. As Lou Gerstner, the legendary head of IBM, says of his stellar diversity initiative that helped turn around the company, “ We made diversity a market-based issue. It’s about understanding our markets, which are diverse and multicultural” (Thomas 2004). For XYZU, a culturally competent campus is an essential component of effectiveness. The path to making that campus a reality is through diversity-imbued organizational change.

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