

# Case study



CASE STUDY Alliant Energy Puts Spark into Diversity In this case, the primary case participants are Alliant's managers, acting together with their steering team and internal council; and its suppliers and employees.

2. The organization, Alliant Energy, is a medium sized firm in the power and energy distribution industry. It provides electrical power and natural gas to a customer base of 1 million households in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota.

3. The problems that Alliant may be facing:

3. 1 lack of focus and clarity in its operational definition of diversity as a policy

3. 2 absence of measurable targets to determine when the goal has been attained

3. 3 there may be too many initiatives which appear uncoordinated

3. 4 confusion among employees and suppliers about the firm's expectations regarding diversity

3. 5 lack of information, maybe even monitoring, regarding suppliers' diversification

4. Alliant's lack of clarity and focus in its working definition of diversity as a company policy is the most important problem, because it could easily interfere with a person's basic freedoms. What the firm appears to be aiming for is a personal attitude change among its stakeholders. However, attitude change is internal, thus difficult to measure (Maio, Maio & Haddock, 2010).

5. The initial cause was the launching of the diversity program without a clear definition among managers as well as employees. The problem worsened when it was left to employees and facilitators, rather than management, to define what they thought diversity was. The effect was that

the rules probably went beyond what management initially expected. Naylor (1999) mentioned that the underlying value in American culture is the freedom to one's beliefs. These would include unpopular beliefs that work against diversity. A seminar and training at the workplace may not be enough to change these beliefs, leading to a hidden resentment in some workers.

6. Alliant operates in an industry that is high-tech, requiring constant innovation, creativity, and fresh ideas. An organization that can come up with technical advances first, operate more efficiently, and provide reliable service at the safest and cheapest way possible, will be differentiated from its competitors. But if the company puts priority on diversity before its need to find the best technical materials and people, efficiency and safety may suffer.

7. Diversity in the workforce provides a greater source of creative ideas and knowledge of customers; it therefore creates competitive advantages for the organization. Diversity among suppliers may lower costs and improve sources of materials as suppliers compete with each other. But Alliant wants people to accept diversity at a personal level. At this level, accepting any belief is a personal choice, so the company's efforts may be interfering with personal freedoms beyond what the work demands.

8. The company must set a boundary so that diversity in the workplace is attained without interfering with personal prerogatives. Attitudinal change deals with deeply rooted ideas about race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and class, which people were raised with (Healey, 2005). The company should define to what point a person is expected to adjust to company policy, without interfering with his personal freedom to act or speak.

9. The advantage to setting up concrete boundaries is that employees will be clear on what Alliant wants. However, to change attitudes is a slow process that takes time and involves more resources, and its results are uncertain. Something that is prolonged tends to be forgotten and lose steam in the long-run, and people become less enthusiastic about it, thereby making it irrelevant, just a waste of money and effort.

10. In order to make diversity work, it is important to provide enough time and continuous effort at it, while setting benchmarks and landmarks in order to determine how effective the policy and programs of the organization have been (Thiederman, 2008). A contingency would be to define the behaviour rather than the attitude. A code of employee conduct may be set up to define the desired actions for particular situations.

#### References

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