Free research paper on action plan for reducing racial disparity

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in the Criminal Justice System and Application of

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In Leadership on the Line, Heifetz and Linsky discuss the role of politics in the ability of leaders to effectively lead (2002, p. 75). A full chapter is devoted to how a leader should think politically in order to survive the dangers of leading. Among the political skills suggested are identify an ally, keep an eye on the opposition, be willing to admit your part in the issue, recognize the loss of those who have to change, personally model that change, and accept there will be loss (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, pp. 75- 100). One social issue that has strong political overtones is that of race and ethnic bias or disparity. This issue has direct implications for the criminal justice system, and criminal justice leaders are seeking answers as to how to identify, evaluate, and address racial inequality within their system (Nellis, Greene, & Mauer, 2008). This paper provides a hypothetical action plan, as could be formulated by a project led by a criminal justice leader, with the aim of reducing racial disparity within the criminal justice system.

Application of Political Leadership skills

The described action plan provides ample opportunity for the application of the political leadership skills described by Heifetz & Linsky (2002). For example, three political skills described within Leadership on the Line seem particularly applicable to this scenario. First, it will be essential to identify at least one powerful ally per stage of the criminal justice system found to have

illegitimate racial bias within its actions (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 75-7). The stages involved are listed below in step 1. These allies will help back up the findings of the initial research, support the changes suggested by the project, and provide a face within the specific stage for support of the changes that will need to occur.

Next, for whatever stage of the system the leader is from, he or she should acknowledge publically whatever racial disparity is discovered within that stage of the justice system (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 90-92). For example, if the leader is a judge, he or she needs to speak or publish about the role of racial disparity within the judiciary. This action raises the credibility of the project and provides a view of even-handedness such that those involved in other stages of the system will be more likely to participate in the needed changes. This should be followed up with a third political skill, the modeling of the behavior needed for the change. It will be an essential role of the leader to personify the initiatives suggested by the project and a showing of empirical data to support how the leader is personally careful to avoid racial disparity within their practices will greatly promote the success of the project.

Additionally, Heifetz & Linsky provide another important piece of guidance to criminal justice leaders, namely the most likely source of danger for a project of this type. In the chapter on dangers, they discuss the problem of marginalization on a program aimed to increase racial diversity of the users of the Boston Aquarium (2002, p. 33-35). This project also has a danger of the effect being marginalized by opponents to the change. Such marginalization has been seen in criminal justice reform projects (Berman,

Bowen, & Mansky, 2007). Therefore it will be important for the leader involved to continue to focus on the empirical measurements of disparity turned up by the research, and keep a focus on the negative effects on society as a whole if this issue is not addressed. In this way, it will be more difficult for opponents to the system changes suggested to marginalize the goals of the project in an effort to avoid having to make the changes involved.

Thus, the guidance of Heifetz & Linsky provide very concrete and applicable advice to a criminal justice leader seeking to reduce racial disparity in the criminal justice system. There will be a need to find an ally for the project within each of the stages of the criminal justice system that has issues that need to be addressed. These allies will be key to promoting the changes suggested by the project and acting as agents of change in his or her area of expertise. It is also essential that the leader acknowledge the role of his or her stage of the criminal justice system in causing the problem, as revealed by the research of the project. The focus on the research and its results will help deflect any attempts at marginalization of the issue by those who do not support the needed changes. Lastly, the leader will be a role model for the proposed changes and must be ready to personally be evaluated on the issue of racial disparity within his or her practices.

Action Plan for Reducing Racial Disparity

in the Criminal Justice System

Vision statement

The project aims to protect the right of minorities to not be unduly or illegitimately targeted, maltreated, or punished by the criminal justice system because of their racial or ethnic heritage.

Core values

The underlying core value of the project is equality as manifested by equal treatment under the law for all. Other core values include unbiased research, commitment to required change, and monitoring of progress.

Planned Goals/Objectives

The goals of this project are to identify steps within the criminal justice system that show unwarranted racial or ethnic bias and change behavior such that the illegitimate bias is removed.

Subordinate Action Steps

- Determine the disproportionate involvement of minorities at any stage of the criminal justice system. At a minimum, this requires an annual statistical report at each stage of the system that includes racial and ethnic data, including a disparity ratio for race at each decision point. System stages for review include: law enforcement, pretrial, prosecution, defense, judiciary, probation, jail and prison custody, and parole and re-entry.
- Identify and understand decision points within the system where racial and ethnic disparities are seen. This involves delving into the decision points that reveal disproportional racial or ethnic involvement and searching for data patterns surrounding the actions involved.

- Identify likely or plausible reasons for the disparity found and if feasible, find relation to legitimate public safety objectives. This analysis should eliminate the effect of outside influences such as crime rate whenever possible.

- Design and implement strategies to reduce the identified but non-legitimate disparities. Strategies should reflect the decision points identified in step 3.

- Monitor the effectiveness of the implemented strategies to reduce racial and ethnic disparities throughout the system. This requires looking for evidence of change of professional behavior as well as evidence of reduced disparities. (Nellis, Greene, & Mauer, 2008, p. 21).

References

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