Implementation of diversity and inclusion council in lutheran world relief

Sociology

Lutheran Refugees International (LRI) is an International Nonprofit based in Baltimore, Maryland. It was founded in 1950 by American Lutherans wanting to send aid to its fellow Lutherans in Europe after World War 2. They extended their help to all suffering people around the world in 1980. Over the years, LRI has grown into an internationally recognized organization known for innovative services for refugees, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied migrant children and families, migrants in detention, and other vulnerable populations.

LRI is facing its worst global refugee crisis in history currently. Nearly 65 million people have been displaced by violence and persecution. They continue to play a vital role with the United States refugee resettlement program and work every day to pair refugees with LRI's service partners who are equipped to support their needs. In 2000, LRI resettled more than 13, 000 refugees. Their network of partners, volunteers and churches provided refugees with basic, essential services, while also helping them integrate into their new communities. Successful protection, stabilization, and integration processes are core elements of our mission.

For almost 50 years, LRI has been providing unique services for migrants and refugees from around the world. They believe that because of this, they made a difference in the lives of millions of people seeking a safety net in the USA. In addition, their history reflects the Lutherans' deep immigrant roots and commitment to welcoming everyone, especially those who are in need. In partnership with global and local community-based partners, LIRS has helped over 500, 000 migrants and refugees rebuild their lives in America.

I have served as the Global Human Resources Manager for the past ten years at LRI, where we have a total staff of 700 employees globally. We implement programs in 28 countries from 22 offices including Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East and the United States.

I am an African-American female and I have witnessed male supervisors or managers state their disapproval with women in certain positions across the globe. I have also had employee relations issues dealing with employee's complaints about being treated unfairly or differently because of their religion. Specifically, I have had a onetime VP of International Programs tell me directly that he was not going to hire a particular individual because of his sexual orientation. In addition, in the field we have experienced similar issues that relate to lack of knowledge on diversity related matters.

At LRI, the demographics can be broken as such: there are 14 Board members, all white' 6 male and 7 females; 7 members of senior leadership, 4 females and 3 males; staff (HQ only) – 55 females, 30 males; 18 black, 64 white, 2 Asian, 2 Latinos. We also have one transgender staff within the organization based in HQ. I have not included our field staff in this breakdown as getting accurate data from the field has been challenging.

Every now and then we have events that promote cultural diversity including pot lucks, have unbiased trainings, have a parental leave policy and recently set up a Mother's room. In a survey conducted in 2017, when employees were asked if they were proud to tell people where they worked, the response was as follows: 40% strongly agreed 50% agreed, 5% disagreed and 5% were neutral. Employees further went on to say that investing in a

strong diversity and inclusion council would boost employee's moral, improve productivity and put LRI on the same page as other INGO's that have implemented a diversity and inclusion council.

Based on this background of information, LRI as a global organization should invest in a diversity and inclusion council that would educate employees about how to embrace race, equity, gender bias, religious and disability discrimination. This in turn would increase productivity and create a positive environment for employees to flourish on. This proposal will provide a detailed analysis and evaluation of having a diversity and inclusion council based on web research and how it will be to the advantage of an organization.

Cultural Diversity

Some organizations continue to have problems with diversity initiatives because they struggle to define the term diversity itself. According to a survey conducted by SHRM in 2007, only 30 percent of human resources professionals say that their company even has an official definition of diversity. Having said that, diversity can be defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. Cultural diversity on the other hand is when differences in race, ethnicity, age, ability, language, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, religion or sexual orientation are represented within a community. It is important to note that with this definition, no particular culture is superior to the other. Organizational Development Practitioners (OD) should make it a point of

duty to familiarize themselves with the concepts surrounding diversity and inclusion and be prepared to address any unexpected concerns.

For the purposes of this proposal, we will specifically focus on cultural and gender diversity and how it ties in with inclusion since they can be measured at various levels within the hierarchy at LRI. Once the challenges and advantages surrounding diversity have been addressed, LRI, should be able to come up with a plan that works for the culture of the organization.

Cultural diversity in the workplace is visible when an organization is open to hiring employees from all sorts of different backgrounds irrespective of race, religion and culture. When organization recruits and maintains a diverse pool of individuals, it brings about various benefits to the organization as well as its employees. It is important to note that while cultural differences may not always be visible to one's eye, there can be diverse cultures within various ethnic groups, educational backgrounds, religions and lifestyles. Consequentially, organization leaders will have to constantly be aware of what customs and ideologies their employees hold when communicating the benefits of working for them.

As LRI is an INGO, we have offices in various parts of the world that have different cultures and beliefs. We do not want to set the expectation that having our headquarters in USA makes us superior from our colleagues in India. The end goal is to be inclusive irrespective of the location we are in or our individual culture. An article on the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) website, defines this mindset as, " openness to and awareness of multiple spheres of meaning; a complex representation of

cultural dynamics; and the integration of ideas and actions oriented both to the global and to the local." This mindset is one that values diversity, is comfortable with ambiguity and pushes toward the bigger picture. Senior leaders must be familiar with types of cultural diversity for each country or region that we have offices in and make sure that the right cultural initiatives are implemented. In this case it would be necessary for an OD consultant to make a trip to the actual countries to come up with the right initiatives and plan.

In contrast, having a culturally diverse organization may create some challenges that would also need to be addressed. Research has also linked diversity to negative outcomes such as personnel issues, costs due to harassment and discrimination, lower commitment, inhibited decision making and turnover. Another obstacle that may arise from implementing a culturally diverse program at LRI could be resistance to change. Like any organization, there are always some employees who will be hesitant to accept the fact that the social and cultural demographics of their workplace is changing. However, these challenges can be overcome by implementing ongoing culturally diverse activities to staff and implementing a diversity and inclusion council. This will lead to employees that are culturally sensitive and in turn increase productivity in the organization. Currently at LWR, we have 500 employees that are in various regions and different countries that would definitely benefit from any cultural training that could help in the relations and acceptance of their fellow colleagues.

Diversity in Gender

Gender diversity programs are one of the most common areas of focus, followed by programs focused on ethnicity, age, and race. Over the past years, researchers have been able to show that gender can be linked directly to employment segregation which in turns affects the workplace culture. As a result, several countries including the USA have implemented policies and guidelines or employment laws mandating the presence of female in leadership positions. Women remain underrepresented at every level in corporate America, despite earning more college degrees than men for 30 years and counting.

According to CNN Money, forty percent of today's global workforce are female yet just five percent of global CEO positions are held by women. Beyond this, only 14. 2% of the top five leadership positions in S&P 500 companies are represented by females. Although these numbers are appalling, studies have shown that there is hope that the gender diversity problem will get better.

At LWR, the board is made up of 53% females and the leadership team 57% females. This is a good representation of women at the leadership level; however, overall, there are only 25% of women in leadership roles within the organization globally. Overall, women are still largely under represented on corporate boards, despite continued efforts to improve inclusion and boardroom gender diversity. Only 15 per cent of board seats worldwide are held by women, a modest increase from the 12 per cent reported in the 2015 edition of a similar report. Norway has the largest share of board seats held by women at 42 per cent, followed by France (33 per cent) and Sweden (32

per cent). The UK is 12th on 20 per cent, an increase from 15. 6 per cent in 2015. New Zealand has achieved the strongest growth since 2015, with the number of board seats held by women increasing to 28 per cent from 18 per cent and the number of female chairs increasing to 11 per cent from five per cent. These findings suggest that mandatory legislation offers an effective framework to increase the number of women on the boards of organizations.

In our field offices, majority of the work is done by female workers. As a result, executive staff should understand the particular abilities that women bring to the profession. In most of the countries, the norm is for women to be submissive especially to their male colleagues and the myth is that they will not excel in a leadership role. We also see that women are usually less confrontational than their male colleagues, they have a lower likelihood of using excessive force and have the ability to exercise empathy and effectively diffuse difficult situations, which makes them excellent leadership candidates. But as the Chief Impact Officer at Rise Against Hunger states, " Gender inequality is a pressing global issue with huge ramifications not just for the lives and livelihoods of girls and women, but, more generally, for human development, labor markets, productivity and GDP growth".

However, women continue to face many obstacles surrounding diversity and inclusion such as the struggle to obtain equal pay for doing the same work as men, less recognition in the work place, insubordination and sexual harassment. White males have traditionally dominated the workplace culture.

These are all ongoing issues that have been experienced at LRI and should be addressed. When the OD conducted an employee engagement survey at the organization, diversity and inclusion was the number one change initiative that employees recommended. OD practitioners should administer diversity training and exercises, introduce policies and procedures that address gender diversity to prevent this type of stereotype in any organization.

The Need for Change
The concept of diversity and inclusion has become very popular within the global work force. We see that everyone seems to be talking about it in the context of establishing a society where traditionally underrepresented groups get their fair share of opportunities. As the world moves ahead, the workplace will evolve — not just in terms of technological revolution, but also in terms of its human. Both diversity and inclusion help employees feel valued in any organization by recognizing that there are differences in everyone and overcoming those differences across the organization. It is natural for an individual to want to belong, feel appreciated and treated fairly regardless of their cultural identity. As a result, when organizations invest in diversity, they gain employees that are happy, and this in turn will increase productivity in the organization.

The reasons for building a diverse and inclusive organization go beyond the idea that welcoming people with cultural or gender differences is the right thing to do. Diversity and inclusion are essential for organizations to maintain a competitive advantage as it is tied to improved business performance. In fact, studies show that highly inclusive organizations

generate 1. 4 times more revenue and are 120 percent more capable of meeting financial targets. Not to mention, individuals from diverse backgrounds can offer a number of different talents, skills and experiences that may benefit the organization and their overall performance. Also, diversity improves employee performance because employees tend to do well in an environment where, at the end of the day, they can be themselves, even though they are unique they become integrated because they see that inclusivity is a priority.

Alongside with increase in performance, a more diverse workforce allows organizations in employee retention. With this in mind, companies that embrace diversity tend to attract and retain a wider range of candidates to their vacancies. Employees feel valued for their individuality and unique contribution so are more likely to stay on for longer. At LRI, since we have employees from various countries, with different backgrounds and gender, and also a variety of culture, these attributes will be beneficial to achieve the mission of the organization. As a global organization, the fact that the demographics of the employees are dispersed should enforce the organization to hire employees that are diverse to deal with each other across the globe.

Once the OD practitioner has identified that there is a need for change, in this case reviewing the need and advantages of diversity and inclusion, it is most important to access how this change initiative will affect the culture of the organization. Organizational culture as defined by Schein is a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of

external adaptation and internal integration. Although several definitions have been given on OC, I like this one because it addresses the external and internal aspects of it. For the organization's culture to be successful, everyone including senior leaders must be on board with it at LRI, majority of the employers would adjust to having a diverse workforce. However, some may find it difficult to adjust due to communication differences, lack of respect and these factors could all lead to conflict which can decrease employee's morale, overall performance and demotivation. To get rid of these problems and introduce a culture that welcomes diversity, the OD practitioner should introduce a diversity and inclusion counsel that would help alleviate any resistance to change.

Recommendations

In order to enforce diversity and reduce discrimination, LRI should set up a diversity and inclusion council. They should make this a priority and set up funds to invest in diversity training. This training will assist with any resistance from employees and help promote an inclusive work environment. The OD practitioner should first identify the needs of the organization by sending out surveys and speaking to key employees across the globe to understand the demographics of the employees they are working with. The OD practitioner should develop training programs and initiate policies and procedures in addition to methods of implementation to help employees adjust to the diverse environment. According to SHRM, the following nine steps should be taken to implement a successful diversity and inclusive initiative: Compile Data, Identify Needs and/or Areas of Concern, Address Policies or Practices Affecting Diversity, Identify Business Objectives, Procure

Buy-in and Support, Implement Initiative, Communicate the Initiative,

Measure and Disseminate Outcomes and Review and Adjust (

Despite these efforts, some employees may still be opposed to diversity. To

deal with opposition, managers should make sure that there is a vast

representation of employees in the diversity and inclusion council, provide

ongoing training and allow all members within the council to provide input on

and feedback on the training.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of implementing diversity and inclusion in the

workplace is to promote a conducive work environment that includes

harmony, growth, productivity and creativity through acceptance of

individual and group differences. Also, in any organization, there will be

differences that can cause tension. Therefore, it is essential for LRI to have

diversity management training and policies in place. As an OD practitioner,

am proposing that a diversity and inclusion council be set up to take active

interest in promoting mandatory training activities and events that

encourage a more diverse and inclusive work environment. As a global

organization, it is important to note that diversity and inclusion has become

a critical issue for organizations due to globalization and the need to

maintain a competitive business advantage. Research has shown that a

diverse workforce improves customer success, allows companies to keep up

with increased profits, provokes innovation, and improves employee

performance. However, a few drawbacks of introducing this initiative have

been identified such as a decrease in employee morale and employee

retention; nonetheless, we can avoid these by implementing change processes that go along with our organization's culture.

Although there is no right or wrong method of implementing and managing diversity a for everyone, certain mandatory factors should be taken into consideration for the D&I council to be successful. However, senior leadership and the organizational development team should recognize that since LRI is a global organization, there will be cultural differences, various types of communication styles and conflicting opinions. At the end of the day what matters is having a strong organizational culture that promotes and enforces respect for one and another and reduces discrimination whilst promoting diversity and inclusion.