



Why Make Diversity So Hard to Achieve?

Your company is like practically every company I've known; it's been working for years to add diversity to its leadership ranks. Why doesn't it have more to show for its efforts? I don't doubt that your managers sincerely want to reshape the talent pipeline. My exposure to countless diversity initiatives suggests that you're tripping yourself up in four ways.

You've distributed the responsibility for increasing diversity. It's standard: You probably have a campus recruitment team, a separate group driving lateral hiring, and a diversity department concerned with retention and inclusiveness. Recruitment teams focus on hiring goals, but they aren't accountable for how well new employees perform or how many remain after two years. Diversity departments, which do track new hires' success (and, unlike recruiting, can commit funds to programs beyond the current budget cycle), are disconnected from recruitment strategies.

If no one person or group is responsible for building a diverse senior management pipeline, it's hard to develop an integrated, game-changing strategy. And outside experts, faced with your multiple stakeholders' distinct agendas, can't even have a strategic discussion with you, let alone get buy-in for a comprehensive approach. So you're not getting the "better mousetrap" solutions you get from innovative supplier ecosystems in other areas of your business.

You're managing activities, not outcomes. Your diversity initiatives probably focus on "inputs" such as the number of mentoring programs, event sponsorships, or résumés collected, and you count them as successes that demonstrate senior man-

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agement's commitment to change. Instead you should think about performance as strategically as you do in your core operating businesses: Be very clear about what success will look like in five years. Define metrics to track progress toward that vision. Prioritize among competing tactics, and drive increased investment toward initiatives that produce results. Use feedback to make refinements along the way.

Your focus is on fixing the culture. Changing the organizational culture to level the playing field is important. But culture change happens very slowly—and usually not at all until new faces have appeared in your company's leadership ranks and new perspectives have begun to reshape its strategies. Your first priority should be to improve performance and promotion rates in underrepresented groups. You'll find that culture change comes more readily from a critical mass of diverse executives than from a series of diversity and inclusion seminars or one high-profile minority hire.

You prioritize minority candidates for diversity department roles. This practice is everywhere, and it's understandable. But minority managers are usually struggling themselves with the issues their companies want them to solve. They may be risk-averse—especially given their awareness that, with so few senior minority members around, they and their new strategies are highly visible. A company that wants its diversity executives to advocate for bold new approaches should think about rotating high-performing line executives (whether minority or nonminority) into diversity roles. Having already established their reputations internally as revenue producers, they can navigate any setbacks that come from new approaches.

Don't undermine your own efforts to make your leadership pipeline more diverse. Instead, incorporate the same rigor and results orientation that you apply elsewhere in your operations. The problem is entirely manageable—if you're willing to manage it.