

# National Center for Women & Information Technology

## PROMISING PRACTICES

### Establishing Institutional Accountability (Case Study 1)

One of the Most Effective Ways to Achieve Organizational Diversity



#### Career

Company ABC — with 30,000 employees in 100 offices worldwide — develops information infrastructure technology and solutions for information management and storage. Five years ago, the company began the process of establishing formal accountability for diversity because company leaders saw it as necessary to retain employees, foster better business practices, compete nationally and internationally, and better respond to client needs.

To establish accountability, the company established a diversity committee that oversees nine business-specific diversity councils — one for each major business unit within the company. Several key features of this structure were important:

#### ■ Top management support and accountability

Each council included executive VPs who were responsible for bi-annually reviewing statistics on workforce diversity to help focus recruitment, employee development, and diversity council priorities. These VPs prioritized and directly assigned the council's work. Importantly, the CEO publicly supported diversity efforts by attending occasional council meetings and acting as an advisor for the different councils' efforts.

#### ■ Local focus and control

Each council was encouraged to create programs for increasing diversity in ways that improved upon their unit's existing local demographics and fit their specialized programs. This local control also helped each council tie diversity goals to that specific unit's business goals. As one diversity director noted, "We have [to make sure] that our executive team ... understands the business impact of diversity on their own business."



#### ■ Internal responsibility and oversight

Diversity councils evaluated each other's programs. Conducting and reporting the statistical analysis of diversity goals was the responsibility of the diversity committee. Statistics were reported to Executive VPs but also made available to all staff members.

Implementing this structure served several important functions. It helped to "keep diversity on the radar" in each unit as people became "busy with so...many initiatives." It also helped ensure that diversity goals and efforts would be varied but targeted enough to meet each unit's unique needs and be tied to each unit's specific business goals.

### ONE COUNCIL'S STORY:

After analyzing unit demographics, one of the Diversity Councils recognized that its most urgent need was to recruit and advance under-represented minorities. At the time, a company-wide mentoring program existed but it had not been successful in increasing diversity. The council decided it needed to refine and narrow the focus of the company-wide program. To do so, it established specific business-unit mentoring programs that targeted certain under-represented groups. High performing and well-respected individuals who were members of the targeted under-represented groups were identified as leaders and worked to develop mentoring programs for that population's needs.

This resulted in significantly more success than the company-wide program as measured both by upward internal assignments and employee satisfaction around the programs. For example, in the African-American mentoring program, 14 black managers were identified and mentored for one year by a senior VP or above. Several of these managers have since received promotions. In addition, this program partnered with an internal organization to recruit a diverse group of interns who rotate around the company for three summers. Each year, between 60-80% of these interns return as employed staff for the company.

#### RESOURCES

Case Study Contributors: Alexandra Kalev and Marta Filipski

Source: In-person interviews from larger study conducted by Alexandra Kalev, Frank Dobbin, Erin Kelly, Marta Filipski and their research team.

**NCWIT offers practices for increasing and benefiting from gender diversity in IT at the K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and career levels.**

*This case study describes a research-inspired practice that may need further evaluation. Try it, and let us know your results.*

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## PROMISING PRACTICES

### How Can Companies Achieve Organizational Diversity? with Case Study 1



#### Career

Not all diversity programs are created equal. Those that establish organizational accountability for diversity, whether in the form of full-time diversity staff or a diversity task force, have a far greater impact on increasing the representation of women and minorities in management than either mentoring or diversity training programs.

To date, organizations typically employ three different kinds of diversity programs: 1) establishing organizational accountability for diversity, 2) diversity training to reduce unconscious bias, and 3) mentoring or other social networking strategies to reduce the social isolation often experienced by members of underrepresented groups. A recent study by Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly measured the effectiveness of these three types of diversity programs. The research team measured change in representation of minorities in 708 private sector organizations. Key findings were:

- Diversity committees that are held accountable for reaching diversity goals increased the odds of holding management positions by 19% for white women, 27% for black women, and 12% for black men.
- Social networking resulted in a modest positive effect for white women but a negative effect for black men, while mentoring produced a positive effect for black women.
- Diversity training alone was the least effective of the three types of strategies. While these training efforts increased the odds of reaching management by 7% for white women, they actually decreased the odds for black women and black men by 6% and 8% respectively.
- Establishing organizational accountability in conjunction with either mentoring or diversity training, however, sometimes increased the effectiveness of these two strategies.

These findings are particularly important for assisting corporations in implementing the most effective diversity programs. Corporations use committees or staff accountable for diversity less often than they use other kinds of programs. For example, while 39% percent of companies in the above study had diversity training programs, only 20% utilized diversity committees, and only 11% employed diversity staff. This suggests significant changes need to be made if corporations are to get the “most bang for their buck” when it comes to effectively achieving diversity.

#### RESOURCES

Kalev, A., Dobbin, F. & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses: Assessing the effectiveness of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review*, v. 71, 589–617.

Mannix, E. & Neale, M. (2005). What differences make a difference? The promise and reality of diverse teams in organizations. *American Psychological Society*, v 6, 2, 31-55.

Metzler, C. (2006). The need for a critical, institutional approach to diversity in organizations. *Cultural Competence in Health Care*, 14, 1.

For more information, also see Cornell's ILR School Diversity and Inclusion Practice Program <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/mgmtprog/dm/>

#### COMPONENTS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

- Set clear, measurable goals for diversity.
- Implement evaluation procedures for ongoing measurement of these goals.
- Hold managers accountable for promoting as well as hiring diverse employees.
- Involve members of majority groups (e.g., white males) in leading accountability and other diversity efforts.
- Ensure that leaders of diversity efforts include senior employees who actually have the authority to make, carry out, and enforce necessary decisions.
- Maintain a definition of diversity that focuses on groups who have historically experienced underrepresentation or discrimination. Do not dilute this definition to include “all differences.”

“Strategies designed to change individuals are less effective than the conventional management solution of setting goals and assigning responsibility for moving toward these goals.”

~ Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006)

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Visit [www.ncwit.org/practices](http://www.ncwit.org/practices) to find out more.

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