Successful applications of diversity, equity, and inclusion programming in various professional settings: Strategies to increase DEI in libraries

By: Colleen M. Foy

Abstract:

Today libraries stand as the most inclusive institution in US society, but their workforces remain unaligned with the wide-ranging domestic demographic. With 83% of librarians identifying as white in 2020, this institution requires cultural reconstruction to enable its information literacy goals. As diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts have been unsuccessful over the years in libraries, this report surveys efforts in industries with more diverse workers and adapts them for implementation in library settings. Recruitment, retainment, and inclusion strategies in corporate, STEM, and healthcare environments are reviewed to identify successful options as starting points for library planners. Practical adaptations are provided as more feasible options for library budgets and personnel volumes. As libraries were founded and transformed to serve the varying needs of all patrons, incorporating these DEI tools into planning strategies is imperative to diversify library labor forces and eliminate barriers to information literacy.

Article:

Introduction

Libraries offer essential services that include reliable access to books and the internet. These sources provide academic, development, employment, and entertainment options for all members of the communities they serve. These are especially important to marginalized groups—people of color, seniors, immigrants, children, individuals with disabilities, and other special needs groups—who may not otherwise have access to free and reliable sources of information ("Library Professionals," 2020). Because of the service platform and commitment of libraries, they stand to be the most inclusive institution in U.S. society (Jaeger, 2018). It is logical that an

institution committed to providing access and services to such diverse groups would consist of providers from equally diverse backgrounds; however, the library workforce is neither representative nor inclusive of the minoritized communities they serve.

According to the Department of Professional Employees Library Professionals Facts & Figures report, librarians are less diverse than the total of education, training, and library industries combined with over 83% of librarians being white or non-Hispanic, 7.1% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 5.3% as Black or African American, and 3.5% as Asian or Pacific Islander in 2019 ("Library Professionals," 2020). Despite efforts to diversify its workforce, the library industry holds an extremely homogenous demographic. This lack of diversity impedes the user's ability to access services at their greatest potential and creates the possibility to alienate the very people it was developed and stands to serve. This report will highlight successful DEI programs in industries outside of library settings to inform and restructure the ineffective efforts made by libraries over the years in the areas of employee recruitment, retainment, and inclusion. For this research, the definition of a successful program varies upon the organization. Each organization boasts substantial qualitative or quantitative achievements relative to their unique DEI goals and qualifies their programs as a means to diversify their workforces.

Literature review

The programs surveyed here embrace and enhance three areas of focus which afford them success in diversifying their workforces. The first strategy includes hiring diverse talent through comprehensive recruitment strategies including pursuing diverse applicant pools and convincing candidates they are embarking on a career driving journey rather than simply a position of employment. Second, proving to a workforce their organization is worthy of its tenure through retainment efforts including mentoring and employee development options is essential. Lastly, inclusion efforts affording the sense of belonging in all employees serve to improve performance of the individual, team, and organization overall.

Recruitment

The priority in any organization's recruitment strategy that strives to attract diverse talent should be to present itself as the employer of choice. This requires competitive strategies that embrace DEI programs as truly important rather than timely initiatives (Alburo et al., 2020).

The Target retail corporation has been recognized for nine years by DiversityInc's "Top 50 Companies for Diversity" and boasts its diversity and inclusion (D&I) plan is increasing its diverse workforce at all levels (Alburo et al., 2020). Target's D&I office has been in place for 10 years due to its commitment and acknowledgment of this movement requiring ongoing and long-term attention. Three of Target's best strategies instrumental in upholding their commitment to D&I and relative to recruitment include: (1) a presence at career fairs hosted by diverse organizations and offering in-store employment kiosks in the communities in which they serve, (2) hiring veterans and active reservists and offering them benefits, and (3) creating D&I counsels that provide onboarding, networking, and development opportunities for employees at all levels (Alburo et al., 2020)

Target attracts diverse talent further by offering tangible opportunities and incentives. In 2017, the retailer committed to increasing minimum wage to $15/hr. by 2020 (Alburo et al., 2020) and did so according to its *A Bullseye View* press release in July 2020 (Target, 2020). They conduct regular pay audits to guarantee equitable pay across teams. Furthermore, when its third-party recruitment firm does not provide a diversified talent pool, Target works with the firm to broaden it. Also, to further commit to hire not only diverse talent but at all levels, Target creates career pathways for low to mid to high levels by offering tuition reimbursement and paid training and development programs (Alburo et al., 2020). Although its office of D&I focuses on these strategies, "the ultimate goal is to maximize the number of people committed to D&I and minimize the number who are merely complying, to shift accountability to everyone, instead of just the D&I team" (Alburo et al., 2020, p. 91).

MetLife, the global financial services organization, has nearly 50k employees and various DEI focused awards including Best Companies for Latinas and Top 100 Innovators in Diversity & Inclusion. Prior to its inception of a learning curriculum to entice entry level professionals, the insurance industry was not an attractive option for new graduates and their interest in career development (Alburo et al., 2020). The cornerstone of this program included demonstrating to recruits "before they were hired why working at MetLife would be beneficial for their careers" (Alburo et al., 2020, p. 93). Leaders charged program developers to create a culture where MetLife was the first-choice employer rather than a last resort decision.

Recruitment efforts started at local universities near MetLife hiring offices and included a commitment that ensured 25% of applicants hired identified with underserved minority groups. This curriculum was designed to train new employees to not only do their jobs but to be more engaged as MetLife employees. Managers shared defined career paths, provided opportunities for social and professional activities among office locations, and hosted informal learning network options through cohorts which provided exposure to various geographic locations of interest. Gallup Q12®, a professional engagement survey MetLife has used for many years, confirms through feedback data that a manager's involvement is a key factor in employee engagement which ultimately leads to higher employee performance. MetLife's career path development for new recruits coupled with manager involvement provided a sense of value, the prospect of advancement, and opportunities for engagement from the beginning stages of employment (Alburo et al., 2020). This bridge to employee engagement leads to the next area of focus in this discussion—employee retainment.

Retainment

Recruiting a diverse workforce is essential for business development success. However, if turnover leaves an organization constantly searching for talent, the pool will ultimately be exhausted as individuals are driven to employers who also practice retainment strategies to keep them in perpetuity.

As in libraries, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) industries struggle to attract and keep underrepresented groups. According to Pew Research, blacks, Asians, and Hispanics working in STEM jobs are less likely than whites in the same fields to think members of their racial or ethnic groups are usually treated fairly when it comes to hiring, promotion, and

advancement (Funk & Parker, 2018). The American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET) is a nonprofit scientific society whose 5,000 members conduct pharmacological research within various settings. The ASPET Mentoring Network was developed for PhD students and postdocs to support two STEM industry priorities: increasing access to careers beyond academic science and increasing & maintaining diversity in their workforces. Groups were assigned an ASPET professional, or coach, and members were introduced prior to the society's annual meeting where they had several chances to meet in person in an introductory fashion. 12 groups were developed each year from 2016 to 2018 and consisted of a variety of members including those from various underrepresented or marginalized groups—five cultures from 14 countries with multiple career interests (Womack et al., 2020).

Groups were designed based on the assumption around STEM PhD students and postdocs having unevenly available information and support on career options. Furthermore, "individuals from underrepresented or marginalized groups are at higher risk of insufficient mentoring, leading to lower sense of self-efficacy with respect to given career goals" (Womack et al., 2020, p. 3). The imposter syndrome also has the potential to invade these groups and pose the risk of not progressing in a given career. The positive outcomes of the ASPET Mentoring Network were many. Group sessions led to several benefits: sharing and listening to others' experiences, realizing hardships in similar situations are experienced by all, acknowledging diversity in thoughts and differing perspectives on problems, and bonding and camaraderie with likeminded peers. One-on-one sessions provided useful outcomes as well: deeper discussions of individual career plans and needs, establishing expectations for both coach and mentee, and individual-specific development and career strategies. The frequent contact with peers and coaches led to comfort raising questions and concerns among members (Womack et al., 2020).

Coca Cola also provides a great example of a comprehensive mentoring program that aims to retain and promote employees of color. This program was created by an external task force over a five-year period following *Ingram v. Coca-Cola* where black employees claimed discrimination relative to white counterparts. Components of this program included one-on-one and group mentoring, access to a mentoring coordinator, and ongoing training and evaluation. Through this consistent evaluation, additional options were added including self-study workbooks, executive level mentors, and a "Networking for Success" course. Mentors, mentees, and groups were recruited and created through widespread communication and a formal application process; all participants were matched through a specific process and participated in mentor/mentee trainings (Alburo et al., 2020).

As a result of Coca-Cola's mentoring program, the company's rank on DiversityInc's "Top 50 Companies for Diversity" moved drastically forward over seven years. In 2001, they ranked 48th; in 2008, Coca-Cola reached 2nd place. At the end of the five-year initiative, "80% of mentees remained with the company, of whom 45% were minorities" (Alburo et al., 2020, p. 98). Furthermore, 80% of the retained employees experienced position changes: 38% lateral and 42% promotions. 50% of these were minority participants indicating the initially desired outcome to support those groups in the areas of professional development and retention was achieved. With both Coca-Cola and ASPET, mentoring programs were not only developed to increase retention among workforce constituents, but also, to create trust among peers and members of leadership. Trust does not develop without a perceived safe and supportive environment and one free of

competing or conflicting interests (Womack et al., 2020). This ideal setting fosters the next major area of DEI—inclusion.

Inclusion

Human DNA includes a need for social belonging, however, so many people report feeling isolated at work. "US businesses spend eight billion dollars each year on diversity and inclusion training that miss the mark because they neglect our need to feel included" (Carr et al., 2019, para. 1).

The Departments of Surgery at the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) and the University of Michigan (UM) are taking a closer look at their culture to foster its evolution and the feelings of inclusivity in their surgical staff. This charge was not the result of reported cases of cultural intolerance but by a small number of staff surgeons concerned about the morale and development of their colleagues. They acknowledged the "increasing evidence that cumulative exposure to subtle or overt discrimination lowers workplace productivity, increases attrition, and contributes to achievement gaps between underrepresented physicians and their white male colleagues" (Harris et al., 2021, p. 97). This effort is integrated into a monthly General Surgery Mortality & Morbidity (M&M) conference at each facility and is coined the "Cultural Complications" module. The standard M&M forum discusses current medical or surgical complication cases; the Cultural Complications module replaces one case per session.

Each module is comprised of a DEI topic from a toolkit, or case bank, developed for this purpose. A case includes a topic and scenario of how it effects the hospital environment. To avoid a moralist approach, each case defines key terminology, reviews foundational science, and is heavily data driven by including evidence-based response strategies. Presenters may choose a case based on their own personal experience; however, a script is available, complete with discussion prompts, and is designed to be presented in 10 minutes. In an exemplary module, a patient denigrates a colleague's black-presenting name.

Discussion prompts include how colleagues hearing such remarks should respond, how individuals can better recognize and quell automatic responses that are grounded in racist or discriminatory constructs, and how systems can take steps to prevent such reactions from translating into differences in clinical care (Harris et al., 2021, pp. 97–98).

By crowd-sourcing scenarios and responses, demonstrating that experiences are widely shared, and conducting these discussions in the M&M conference which includes all levels of department hierarchy, this format strongly supports the inclusivity among staff and indicates that leadership opposes bias.

Another model organization living its diversity & inclusion principles is Reynolds American, Inc (RAI). In 2020, RAI received its fourth straight Great Place to Work certification. As a result, it is also now on Fortune's 2020 "Best Workplaces" list (RAI, 2020c). This certification confirms an organization as one that fosters revenue-driving practices in its workforce and a leader in workplace culture and innovation. More than 85% of RAI employees call it a great place to work (RAI, 2020c). Guy Meldrum, RAI President and CEO, attributes this accreditation to the

organization's commitment to employee development, diversity, and inclusion and its leaders modeling the RAI Ethos, which includes being bold, fast, empowered, responsible, and diverse (RAI, 2020b). RAI implements and offers superior benefits including 16 weeks of paid leave for new parents, on-site health care clinics, tuition reimbursement, company-wide bonus plans, and employee resource groups (ERGs) (RAI, 2020c).

ERGs, otherwise known as affinity groups or employee advocacy networks, encourage a community culture and foster connection within the RAI workforce. The seven ERGs (Asian American, B.E. Y.O.U.—Black Employee Network Yielding Outreach and Unity, B United—LGBTQ+, Hispanic, New Hires, Veterans, and Women) enhance the Ethos at RAI, participate in external community projects, and incorporate networking and development opportunities among constituents (RAI, 2020a). ERGs welcome allies—support and advocate members who do not identify with group ethnicities, experiences, or backgrounds. Allies are strong components of any affinity network. All groups harbor some elements of privilege and some elements of oppression; therefore, each person can be an ally to another ("Beyond Diversity," 2019). Additionally, RAI ERGs invite all employees to educational trainings and panel discussions, as well as cultural celebrations that encourage interaction and storytelling to demystify cultural polarities and foster understanding and appreciation for differences (RAI, 2020a).

Although these examples, from Target to RAI, emphasize one area of DEI that works for that industry or workforce, all elements should work together synergistically. Engagement during recruitment and inclusion efforts leads to employee retainment. Inclusion program marketing can entice a perspective job candidate who has never experienced the joy of interaction with or embracement of their culture at work. One element is not completely successful without the execution of strategies supporting the others.

Discussion

This all sounds great, but how can these practices be incorporated into the library setting—especially a small one? Libraries are not large corporations with steep budgets let alone allocations for employee development and DEI. These successful strategies occurring outside of libraries however should be adapted and applied to libraries if the industry is truly committed to transforming its workforce into the heterogenous team it so truly needs to influence and engage its users. This is a crucial exercise in all libraries as it will enable and sustain the mission of libraries and foster the information literacy they were put in place so many years ago to share.

Recommendations & implications for libraries

Recruiting diverse talent in libraries

The only commonality between libraries and Target or MetLife is the diverse clients and communities they serve. This commonality is paramount to the organizational strategies that improve service protocols. Employing members within a service community shall demonstrate to enhance that service alone. Seeing a familiar face behind a counter or in the stacks may remove barriers for users. Libraries should prioritize seeking and hiring diverse talent while maintaining typically tight financial constraints. Like Target and MetLife, libraries can attend career fairs

offered by diverse organizations and local academic institutions including community colleges and high schools. Librarians are increasingly younger with the percentage of librarians aged $25-45$ rising from 37 to 47% from 2014 to 2018 ("Libraries in the Contingent Workforce," 2016; "Library Professionals," 2020). As the profession appears to be attracting younger individuals, it is logical to dedicate time at the aforementioned settings and career events to entice students with library career options.

Recruits need to believe libraries are first choice employers—as in MetLife's goal prior to its onboarding curriculum was implemented (Alburo et al., 2020). Additionally, extra attention and career path discussions should be had with library paraprofessionals in academic settings as the demographic among this cross section of the workforce is slightly more diverse ("Library Professionals," 2020). As MetLife achieved higher employee performance by providing more engaged leaders, library managers can position themselves in the same fashion. MetLife managers presented defined pathways to specific roles and levels within its organization and offered socialization and networking opportunities within internal and external office locations. Library managers should serve their direct reports similarly. In situations when a library manager can not extend themselves in this capacity, he or she can assign a more seasoned "onboarding buddy" to provide guidance for the new hire while additionally serving as a development opportunity for the veteran librarian.

Retaining a heterogenous workforce in libraries

Recruitment efforts are futile if programs are not in place that entice talented employees an employer so strategically obtained to stay. Hiring and training are time and cost exhaustive, therefore keeping an employee onboard is better for business if it remains a good fit for both the employee and the organization.

The library and STEM industries struggle with persuading diverse employees to stay onboard. The ASPET Mentoring Network is a great example for libraries to adapt and utilize. Mentors or coaches may be chosen by volunteer or application process while providing development opportunities for librarians at any career stage. New hires should be expected to commit a full year as with the ASPET program and groups can be formed with a variety of constituents in a particular library setting and within an organization: public, academic, and K-12 systems. In this situation, a group coach should not be the direct manager of any group member to influence dialogue about a variety of topics and scenarios, career options, and bonding opportunities with colleagues from different facilities. Group and one-on-one meetings can occur monthly as to not strain regular accountabilities and duties of participants. This type of program, as with the ASPET structure, can allow for increased mentoring offerings for diverse employees, as they tend to lack these opportunities, and foster the self-efficacy required for higher career aspirations (Womack et al., 2020).

Coca Cola has an extremely successful retainment and mentoring program for its workforce; however, its scale is unattainable for most library settings. The development and networking components can be adapted for libraries however through professional memberships. Although these come with a price, group memberships are typically offered at discounted rates along with conference attendance options. The return on the initial investment can be immense as most

trainings, lectures, and development opportunities are free for members. One fantastic example is the Medical Library Association (MLA) which appointed a Diversity & Inclusion Task Force (DITF) in 2017. The DITF was instrumental in updating MLA's mission, vision, values, and code of ethics as well as other defining documents to reflect ethnic and gender inclusivity (Morgan-Daniel et al., 2021). Also included was the inception of revised and new programs: annual conference forums (including the 2018 Fishbowl and the 2019 Roundtable—both of which included diversity dialogues), expanded CE offerings, certificate opportunities—like the Consumer Health Information Specialist (CHIS), critical librarianship webinars, ongoing membership surveys, and the MLA Reads Virtual Book Discussion Group (Morgan-Daniel et al., 2021). The DITF's work exemplifies the need of the library industry to revamp programming and accommodate for a new workforce complete with diverse individuals. Participation in these MLA programs, as well as those of any other professional organization with similar initiatives, will cultivate the same conscious efforts in small libraries and empower individuals to make comparable updates in their own workplace settings all the while making it a place to stay and thrive as a professional.

Inclusion & belonging practices in libraries

According to research performed by BetterUp, an employee development consulting company comprised of behavioral scientists, talent management specialists, and product experts, belonging and inclusion practices are linked to increased job performance, a drop in turnover risk, and a reduction in sick days. For a large company, this could save millions on an annual basis (Carr et al., 2019).

Libraries are not large employers, but they can reap the benefits of creating an inclusive culture in their workforce. The UMMC and UM surgical departments' Cultural Complications modules can offer a starting place for libraries large and small relative to content and structure. Incorporating discussion modules into regularly occurring staff meetings is ideal as it develops the conversation into a regular topic rather than a novel initiative. Furthermore, the brevity of discussions (10-minute modules) lends itself to alignment with other important topics or program strategy planning. Module content would also allow for staff to share topics close to them or learn about a scenario they have not experienced while understanding the best ways to react and respond. This program would not have to be created from the ground up in libraries. The team of UMMC and UM physicians who created Cultural Complications have made it accessible via the website www.culturalcomplications.com. This resource includes a user guide and information instructing institutions how to tailor modules to fit their needs (Harris et al., 2021).

Libraries can also assimilate ERGs into their workforce inclusion planning. RAI has hundreds of employees at their Winston-Salem corporate location to offer their affinity groups. This could be difficult with a small staff as the benefit of these groups reside in volume and momentum which provides not only belonging components but also opportunities for allies to join and offer support. Considering the benefits of belonging and inclusion efforts for employee and business performance however, this effort should be introduced and applied to varying sized teams. If multiple affinity groups are not an option, teambuilding events can mimic the storytelling, development, and bonding effects of the large-scale structure. These events do not have to include the traditional full- or half-day of programming. Short bouts of "get to know me"

sessions may be merged with typically occurring meetings. Also, when and if appropriate, happy hour or game night styled events can lend themselves to a sense of belonging in smaller teams.

Conclusion

Despite the efforts made by libraries to diversify their workforces and align with national demographics to better serve their wide range of diverse patrons, they have fallen short of achieving their diversification goals. Short of personnel volume and operating budgets, libraries are not much different than the organizations highlighted in this report. They all recognized an issue with their workforce lacking diverse talent either from employee feedback or through leadership forethought and linked this shortcoming to missed business opportunities and employee successes. As libraries lack the volume and budgets of large companies, they must modify these successful DEI programming examples to catch up with the nation's demographics. Although libraries have a lot of work to do, it is well worth the effort. If any industry can do it, libraries can. They were founded to store information and make it accessible to those seeking it. Libraries later went on to convert this information into accessible formats for the wide range of those in need. They have since transformed into community centers that aid in fighting illiteracy rates. Libraries have been adaptable and steadfast and will prove to perform the same in this imperative charge to diversify their labor force.

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