Integrating HR and Diversity Strategy: A Case Study

By Edna Chun, Alvin Evans

Made available courtesy of the College & University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR): http://www.cupahr.org/hew/index.aspx

Abstract:

In today's rapidly changing global environment, colleges and universities need to expand their diversity capability through a strategic framework that aligns HR and diversity programs. To realize the full benefit of their talent potential, campuses must overcome the functional divide that frequently exists between the HR and diversity functions to form a cohesive, expansive and unified talent management and talent sustainability strategy that capitalizes upon the rich potential of diverse human capital resources.

Keywords: Administration | Diversity | Diversity Strategic Plan | Higher Education | Human Resources | Inclusion | Management

Integrating HR and Diversity Strategy –
A Case Study By Edna Chun and Alvin Evans

In today's rapidly changing global environment, colleges and universities need to expand their diversity capability through a strategic framework that aligns HR and diversity programs. To realize the full benefit of their talent potential, campuses must overcome the functional divide that frequently exists between the HR and diversity functions to form a cohesive, expansive and unified talent management and talent sustainability strategy that capitalizes upon the rich potential of diverse human capital resources.

Thanks to two forward-thinking leaders, Duke University has realized this alignment and has reaped the benefits of strategic HR and diversity collaboration.

Background

In December 2009, Kyle Cavanaugh joined Duke University as vice president for administration with oversight of human resources and a core staff of 120 people. Reporting to the executive vice president of finance and administration, Cavanaugh's responsibilities quickly expanded to include Duke police, emergency management, disability management for students and employees, and parking and transportation services. The HR officer for the health system has a dotted line to Cavanaugh's position. As is the case at many universities, HR's administrative responsibilities for faculty are focused in the areas of benefits and workers' compensation, with faculty recruitment and compensation delegated to the dean and departmental levels.

Cavanaugh quickly formed a close working relationship with Benjamin Reese Jr., vice president of the office of institutional equity and chief diversity officer (CDO) for the university and its health system. Reese reports to the president and joined the university 17 years ago. He is the only CDO nationally who has full responsibility for diversity in both a university and its health system. The CDO position at Duke was created a quarter century earlier, with the role encompassing the campus and Duke's hospital, and then a decade ago, the Duke University Health System was formed. Reese now oversees a staff of nine people, three of whom are directors responsible for diversity, inclusion, affirmative action, and complaint

resolution and harassment/discrimination prevention. In addition to his responsibilities as Duke's CDO, Reese is president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education and has made an active commitment to make sure his office is involved in national policy leadership and discussions.

Trust, Transparency and Strategic Alignment

Prior to Cavanaugh's arrival, Reese describes the relationship between HR and diversity as more ad hoc and less structured. Many issues were discussed only when they reached a certain level of severity. The partnership between HR and diversity that Cavanaugh and Reese have worked to developed reflects strong collaboration in three areas: regular structured meetings, alignment of the philosophy on diversity and inclusion and the resultant strategy, and the development of trust and transparency between the two leaders themselves that results in synergistic outcomes. In addition to their regular meetings, Cavanaugh also holds a monthly HR forum in which Reese participates.

Both leaders serve as staff liaisons to the board of trustees' HR committee. Cavanaugh sees the convergence of HR and diversity efforts in several broad areas: proactive initiatives that begin at the point of recruitment and orientation and include managerial and leadership training programs with a diversity component; regulatory efforts like the affirmative action plan and collection of applicant tracking data; and complaint resolution issues that may affect employment. The coordination needed in these areas requires interaction not only between Cavanaugh and Reese, but also between their staffs.

For example, in the applicant tracking area overseen by HR, the university averages 14,000 applicants per month, a volume that requires a high level of tracking and analysis. This data is the basis for affirmative action and equity reviews of hiring processes. Reese tracks the number of vacancies at senior levels and the number of women and minorities hired into these positions on a monthly basis and presents a progress report annually to the HR committee of the board of trustees.

Despite differences in Cavanaugh's and Reese's reporting relationship, Reese said that the organizational structure "is really secondary to the alignment of philosophy and the relationship of transparency and trust. It doesn't mean that we agree on every single issue, but we are aligned in terms of philosophy." Cavanaugh similarly notes that "every organization is structured slightly differently," adding, "my personal opinion is that the organizational structure is somewhat irrelevant. I think what becomes most important is do you have that trust, transparency and collaboration?"

The two leaders view alignment of their offices' mission with the university's mission as the primary focus of their strategic planning processes. When undertaking new initiatives, Reese asks himself if the step he is about to take is grounded in inclusion and if it includes departments that should have significant engagement in the strategy. He also wants to ensure that the strategy fosters diversity in its broadest sense, involving different perspectives, viewpoints and cultures.

Reese produces an annual report on diversity progress but has not created a separate diversity strategic plan. He says his primary focus is on alignment with the overall institutional strategic plan. When the university's strategic plan was created, Reese helped ensure that the documents

The process of integrated HR/diversity planning takes place in response to specific issues as well in the development of new initiatives and programs. For example, Reese oversees the task force on LGBT issues for faculty and staff, and works with Cavanaugh to involve the committee in their activities and recommendations. The two leaders review together employee processes and procedures in the area of diversity, and when Cavanaugh established a new year-long leadership program, he tapped Reese for the steering committee, since one of the goals of the leadership program is to identify minorities and women with potential for leadership roles to facilitate a diverse pipeline for succession planning.

The Challenge of Organizational Culture

The culture of higher education poses distinct challenges for collaborative HR and diversity practices because of the environmental characteristics of size, complexity and decentralization. For example, Reese met with a cross-section of individuals at Duke to discuss the possibility of forming a health disparities working group. The stakeholders in the meeting recognized that there were probably three or four other conversations about the same issue going on at the same time elsewhere across the institution. As Reese pointed out, "That is the nature of these kinds of organizations and presents some challenges in putting together a focused strategy, having knowledge of what implementation approaches work, and what area is doing what."

The culture of higher ed poses distinct challenges for collaborative HR and diversity practices because of the environmental characteristics of size, complexity and decentralization.

Cavanaugh described the challenge as a "difference" and also a "reality" that may exact an implementation tax in terms of time: "If one work in higher education and expects to change that culture, that's going to be a tough road to travel every day," he says. "In the case of diversity activities, we need to understand that it may take a long period of time to get initiatives going, because we must engage many constituents. The actual outcome can be much broader and deeper because we have so many people involved."

submitted by all the professional schools contained a diversity and inclusion component, but more important, related to the university's overall direction. In his view, "that kind of approach is more productive than a diversity plan that is not connected to where the institution is going." As a result, Duke's strategic plan identifies diversity as one of five enduring themes that define the university.

Cavanaugh engages in an annual strategic planning process in which each functional area establishes goals, objectives and metrics that cascade downward into a performance plan and roll upward into institutional directions. This planning process involves a scan of the internal and external environment.

To build synergy across Duke's large, complex health system, Reese has implemented a three-level structure for engaging hospital leadership in diversity. Beginning in 2001, he created diversity leadership groups at each of the three hospitals that include the hospital president and

18 to 25 key stakeholders. Once a quarter, a system-wide diversity leadership group composed of the presidents of hospital units and senior leaders from the health system meet to align strategies and develop new approaches. At the highest level, an executive diversity leadership group for the entire health system meets to create overall direction for diversity and implement three areas of focus: human capital (increasing the number of women and underrepresented minorities at the senior level), cultural competence and health disparities.

Diversity at Senior Leadership Levels

In crafting a comprehensive diversity strategy for the university, Reese continues to brainstorm with Cavanaugh about helping Duke strengthen diversity at senior levels of the institution. In former years, Reese made presentations at the first meeting of the search committees for deans or senior officials. He soon recognized that hundreds of critical interactions and conversations would take place during the search process and that search committee members could quickly forget about the initial meeting.

On the recommendation from a group of faculty members to the president, Reese became an active ad hoc member of every senior-level search. This change coincided with a shift in the way the provost interacted with search committees. As a result of this new strategy, the first minority dean of a professional school (the graduate school) was hired in 2012, followed by the hiring of a second minority dean for the Duke chapel.

In the continuing discussion between the president and Reese about ways to engage senior leaders in diversity strategy in their areas of responsibility, Reese worked with the president to implement a plan in 2012 that requires each of the university's top 35 leaders to develop three strategies/initiatives that affect diversity and submit them to the president. In April 2013, these strategies were compiled in a report for the president and the HR committee of the board of trustees. The 35 university leaders each sent two people to a half-day workshop to discuss the definitions of diversity and inclusion and their alignment with the university mission.

Future Challenges

What challenges remain that will require further collaboration? The area of internationalization and global engagement offers new opportunities for continued synergy between the two units. Duke is currently building a full campus in Kunshan, China, which has involved Cavanaugh extensively in the workforce planning process.

Reese also foresees changes in his role as the individual schools at Duke become more proficient in leading their own diversity initiatives. "I suspect in the years to come if I am successful in getting units to really focus on diversity

> With diversity activities, know that it may take a long time to get initiatives going because of the many constituents that must be engaged.

strategy that aligns with their work, they will need a different kind of help, as they become more skilled at doing their own diversity work," he says. "I imagine my own responsibilities will shift."

Looking toward the future, Cavanaugh and Reese envision a continued partnership that will further embed diversity in organizational culture and take them beyond the bounds of the university's geographic location to fulfill Duke's mission as an international research university. ⊂UPAhr

Edna Chun is associate vice chancellor for human resource services at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She can be reached at e_chun@uncg.edu.

Alvin Evans is associate vice president for human resources at Kent State University. He can be reached at aevans3@kent.edu.

The case study presented here is an excerpt from Chun's and Evans' new book, The New Talent Acquisition Frontier: Integrating HR and Diversity Strategy in the Private and Public Sectors and Higher Education.