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**Implementation of Diversity Management Programs in Public Organizations:
Lessons from Policy Implementation Research**

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Running Head: Implementation of Diversity Management Programs

Abstract

The U.S. workforce is becoming more diverse, particularly in the public sector. As a result, a number of public-sector employers have initiated diversity management programs aimed to assist different types of employees in their needs at work. While much of the public administration literature has focused on these programs and what makes them work, it has largely ignored a cognate area of study that has much to say about the success of such programs: the policy implementation literature. This paper uses policy implementation research to develop five guidelines for public managers who wish to develop a successful diversity management initiative.

Key words: Diversity; Diversity management; Policy implementation;

Affirmative Action

Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, academics and practitioners alike began to realize the effects of increased diversity on the U.S. workforce. Studies conducted since then have shown that the U.S. workforce is becoming older and more balanced with respect to gender and race, particularly in the public sector.^[1, 2] Despite these trends, employers often are not able to adopt cultural norms and management practices that integrate these “new” employees into the organization, resulting in problems with and cynicism toward any programs aimed at increasing diversity management.^[3-5] These issues have resulted in a growing number of scholars in the public management field paying particular attention to diversity-oriented research.^[3, 6-13] A number of public organizations, particularly in the U.S. federal government, have instituted formal diversity management programs.^[14, 15]

As these diversity management programs increase in number, it becomes increasingly relevant for public management research to consider how they should be implemented and instituted into the organizational culture. If diversity management programs consist of a bundle of diversity-oriented management policies, then it seems logical that policy implementation research might have something to offer in the way of practical advice for those seeking to manage diversity. Published research on diversity management programs and their implementation has never examined what lessons might be derived from the vast literature on policy implementation, and this paper’s purpose is to consider some of the ways in which implementation scholars might inform the work of both scholars and practitioners seeking to understand diversity management.

This paper will commence with a review of the literatures on diversity and policy implementation. It will then outline five lessons that human resources professionals and other public managers might take from the implementation literature in constructing a plan for their diversity management agendas. The paper will close with recommendations for future research in this area.

Diversity in the Population & Workforce

The U.S. population and workforce are both undergoing significant demographic changes. In 1980, whites made up 80% of the total U.S. population.¹ By 2000, that figure had decreased to only 69%, while all other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. had increased. This represents a substantial population shift in a relatively short period of time, and evidence suggests that diversity will continue to increase into the 21st century.^[2] Globalization and related economic changes in the United States have combined to create unforeseen levels of racial and ethnic heterogeneity. Along these same lines, the United States is becoming increasingly diverse on a number of dimensions. More people are speaking languages other than English at home, people with disabilities are becoming more functional with better technology and changing social attitudes, and the aging of the Baby Boom population has increased the number of retired, older citizens.

The labor force is experiencing similar trends, and estimates project that white men will account for only 37% of the U.S. workforce by 2008.² Studies have shown that U.S. workers are becoming older and more balanced with respect to gender and race,

¹ All of these population statistics can be located at www.censusscope.org/us/chart_race.html.

² Workforce projection statistics are available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://stats.bls.gov>.

particularly in the public sector.^[1, 2] The typical assumption is that these changes in the workforce and population require greater efforts toward hiring and retaining diverse employees. Some research argues that diversity is necessary in order for organizations to be “competitive.”^[4]

A fairly prolific line of research has focused on the inclusion and integration of women and people of color into the public sector. This area of work has sought to understand how well different groups have been able to move up the ranks and link that knowledge with organizational attributes. Research has shown that some groups, particularly Hispanics, African-Americans, and Native Americans, are increasing overall representation in the U.S. federal workforce but still lag behind majority employees in average GS grade, pay, and representation in senior pay levels.^[16-18] Research focusing on women in the civil service has produced similar findings, including lower overall representation in the federal workforce than the civilian labor force.^[19-23] Other work has sought to understand the role of sexual orientation and disabilities.^[24, 25]

Although doors are opening slowly to underrepresented groups, there have been few attempts to develop causal models that prove the significance of a given set of explanatory variables. Exceptions to this include Cornwell and Kellough^[26], who used fixed-effects regression to analyze a model of employment share for women and minorities, but few of the variables included were significantly related to integration. Evidence has slowly accumulated as to the role of unions,^[27] agency size,^[10, 28] performance ratings,^[29] and hiring practices^[23] as contributors to integration. The only conclusions that can be drawn from this line of empirical research is that women and minorities tend to be overrepresented in clerical positions and underrepresented in

professional positions,^[9, 10, 26] although disparities are typically less pronounced in the public sector than in the private sector.^[8, 30] Other more conceptual research has drawn links between attitudes and integration,^[31] finding that attitudes toward integration and diversity vary along racial and gender lines.

Inclusion and integration of underrepresented individuals result at least in large part from affirmative action practices that level the playing field for these groups. However, many do not consider affirmative action programs to be a part of diversity management and draw a clear distinction between the two as opposing paradigms.^[11-14] The move from affirmative action to what some define as managing for diversity is controversial. Some researchers denigrate affirmative action as outmoded and no longer relevant,^[32] while others argue that moving attention away from affirmative action results in an increased likelihood of systematic discrimination in hiring and promotion.^[33-35]

The Impact of Diversity on Organizational Outcomes

If underrepresented employees become more and more integrated into the organization, what would be the impact of increased diversity? Very little research in public administration has sought to understand the impact of personnel diversity on organizational outcomes.^[36] However, research in business management, psychology, and social psychology has considered the impact of different types of heterogeneity on performance outcomes.^[13, 37-39] This line of work relies more on positivist methods and hypothesis testing, using quantifiers of heterogeneity in order to explore the effects of diversity.

Research on diversity effects is a sprawling literature that considers the impact of a number of types of diversity on outcomes, including disability, education, race, gender,

functional background, and others. Perhaps the most common type of diversity studied – race and ethnicity – has actually been declining in recent years.^[39, 40] A large number of studies were conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, but these are now out of date and irrelevant, to a large extent, due to changing social values.^[41-43] More recent research is mixed as to whether racial and ethnic diversity results in benefits or drawbacks to organizational performance. While some studies show a positive relationship between racial diversity and outcomes,^[44-47] other studies temper the enthusiasm shown by the above research connecting diversity and performance. A series of studies found that ethnic diversity was unrelated to performance,^[48-51] or related to performance in a negative direction.^[52-55] Some research indicates that in heterogeneous work settings, members of one of the minorities are more likely to leave the organization and suffer from higher rates of absenteeism.^[56] In a study linking manager and street-level bureaucrat diversity to three different performance indicators, Pitts^[36] found no consistent link between ethnic heterogeneity and work-related outcomes.

Other types of diversity produce stronger relationships. For example, age diversity has been consistently found to lead to lower levels of social integration, bad communication, and high turnover rates.^[39] However, gender diversity is frequently related to performance in a positive manner,^[43] as is diversity in education.^[57-59] Results for diversity of functional background are split between positive^[57, 58] and negative.^[60, 61] Some research shows no consistent relationship between diversity and outcomes.^[39]

Understanding the impact of diversity on performance is important for organizations formulating a strategy to manage diversity. If diversity results in increased organizational performance, then an organization may wish to enact policies that

encourage continued diversity and make it desirable for women and people of color to remain in the organization. If diversity results in decreased performance, then an organization will wish to understand how policies and practices might be put into place to *manage* the diversity present and make it productive. In either case, an organization needs to understand how its diversity is affecting performance. The logical next step, then, is to develop practices and policies that retain the positive impact of the diversity or attempt to mitigate the negative impact. As a result, a glut of programs aiming to manage workforce diversity has emerged.

Managing Workforce Diversity

Research on what might be called “managing for diversity” did not appear in public management until the late 1980s and early 1990s.^[13] While attention prior to that had focused in some detail on affirmative action, recruitment, and integration in public organizations,^[23, 27, 28] there had not been much focus on other management practices and policies that worked to ameliorate working conditions for underrepresented groups. Some public management scholars in the area of diversity attribute the shift in attention away from recruitment and toward post-hiring stage management to Thomas’ continuum.^[14, 32] Gradually, since 1990, public management scholars have been moving more and more toward this model of approach to diversity, whether they reflect the continuum directly or rather some version of it.^[11, 12, 62]

Articles on diversity management that appear in the core journals of the field are mostly descriptive, seemingly based on casual observation, and offer little to no analysis of the quality or impact of the program.^[63, 64] Some research on diversity policies has

analyzed reasons for their failure,^[3] whether they benefit certain racial or minority groups,^[34] or whether components of diversity management benefit certain groups.^[65, 66] However, practically no empirical research has been conducted on the effectiveness of diversity management policies in the public sector.^[15] A number of handbooks and desk references on diversity policies and programs are currently in print, but these are directed more at practicing managers than the field of research and often do not address the public sector specifically.^[4, 62, 67-69]

Diversity management has been characterized as a function of human resource management,^[70] and the policies and programs that constitute the diversity management function vary substantially between organizations, including mentoring opportunities, training programs, family-friendly policies, and advocacy groups.^[14] Most definitions of diversity management consider only processes that occur after the hiring stage, differentiating diversity management from affirmative action programs.^[71] For example, the National Institutes of Health pit Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs against “managing diversity,” where AA/EEO is mandatory, legal-based, short-term and limited, while managing diversity is voluntary, productivity-based, long-term and ongoing.³ The sole textbook on diversity management in public organizations places EEO at one end of a continuum, with Affirmative Action in the middle and “managing diversity” at the end.^[11] In Riccucci’s model^[11], managing diversity is “behavioral” and “strategic” while EEO is “legalistic” and “quantitative.” Thomas’ model^[32] is a progression from AA/EEO programs, to “valuing diversity,” to “managing diversity.”

³ http://www1.od.nih.gov/OEO/WDI/managing_diversity.htm; presented in Kellough & Naff, 2004.

This intermediate step – valuing diversity – is an interesting one. Programs that encourage employees to value diversity may be the most prevalent in practice and tend to consist of things like diversity bulletin boards in the office, a diversity newsletter, diversity workshops and team-building, or diversity family days. The idea is that employees will learn more about each other and value their differences, such that the differences can be used to the organization’s advantage. Theory suggests that a cultural synergy can develop when different cultural backgrounds come together at work, such that the final product produced by a heterogeneous work group will be better than the sum of the talents of the individual members.^[72-74] The idea is that diversity gets a group away from the perils of groupthink and toward more creative and effective solutions. Many employees may view “valuing diversity” programs as “fluffy” and without merit, but if employee interaction is appropriately managed and diversity is permitted to flourish, high levels of heterogeneity can lead to synergistic outcomes.

Kellough & Naff^[14] examine what is commonly included in diversity management programs, identifying seven core components: ensuring management accountability; examining organizational structure, culture, and management systems; paying attention to representation; providing training; developing mentoring programs; promoting internal advocacy groups; and emphasizing shared values among stakeholders. As they point out, some of these components – paying attention to representation, for example – are more correctly identified as “affirmative action” or “EEO” programs than “managing diversity” programs, according to the limited definitions offered by some.

The Birth of Policy Implementation

Policy implementation research rarely, if ever, overlaps with the research described above. O'Toole^[75] defines policy implementation as “what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of government to do something, or to stop doing something, and the ultimate impact on the world of action.” It is a relatively new field of research that does not fit neatly into any disciplinary area. It came into existence in the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to many public programs failing to achieve the goals set for them. Many of the Great Society programs, for example, were not working, and it became clear that something between the design of the program and the outcome of the program was causing the failures. Several early efforts pointed out that implementation was to blame,^[76-78] and an interest in implementation was quickly generated. Hargrove^[79] even referred to implementation as the “missing link” in social theory, and since then scholars in public administration, political science, policy analysis, sociology, and even economics, among others, have sought to understand what happens between program design and program outcomes.

A proliferation in policy implementation research occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, springing forth a plethora of research designs, models, and variables to include in quantitative studies.^[75] Some cautioned that the field of public administration was being taken over, wrongly, by implementation research.^[80, 81] However, as scholarship in the 1990s moved more toward new public management and reform questions, interest in implementation has waned.^[75, 82-84]

Three Generations of Policy Implementation Research

Policy implementation researchers have characterized the field as evolving in three “generations” of scholarship.^[75, 85] The first generation is often characterized as the initial scholarship on implementation by scholars like Pressman and Wildavsky^[78] and Bardach.^[86] These studies relied principally on the case study method, frequently with only one or a small number of cases. They laid the groundwork for later research on implementation by establishing some basic characteristics – specifically, they found that implementation was a complex and dynamic process, that a wide variety of actors participated in it, and that a wide range of perspectives existed on what it meant to implement policy. This early line of work was also fairly pessimistic, noting that there was a low probability that everything would actually work correctly. Bardach^[86] wrote that “under-performance, delay, and escalating costs are bound to appear.” Later research would criticize the first generation for being too pessimistic. Their efforts were also generally atheoretical, non-cumulative, and case-specific. Furthermore, their work lacked social scientific rigor, causing many to be skeptical of the generalizability and validity of their statements.

What is referred to as the second generation of research in policy implementation marked an increase in attention to the field. The focus of this generation of research was primarily the debate between top-down and bottom-up implementation – whether implementation does (or should) take place from the top of an organization down to the bottom levels, or from the grassroots level up to the upper ranks. It was characterized by the work of several key scholars, including Berman,^[87] O’Toole^[88] and O’Toole and Montjoy,^[89] Hjern and Porter,^[90] and Mazmanian and Sabatier.^[91] The second generation of research continued to use the case study, but the number of studies flourished.

Research became less pessimistic, even moving toward a design science approach aimed to determine what worked best. The birth of the “too many variables, too few cases” problem perhaps began with an article by O’Toole,^[88] where he examined 100 studies in implementation that formulated over 300 “key” variables in research.

Several contributions mark this stage of work. First, the focus moved beyond the political aspects of implementation to include managerial and organizational aspects as well. Research found that there was a temporal dimension to policy implementation; in other words, implementation took place over time, and time series studies might be the most effective way to tap into the time-oriented effects. Later scholars would criticize this stage of research on implementation for remaining too pessimistic, failing to pare down the number of variables to a manageable number, and focusing too much on case studies with limited external validity.

The third generation of policy implementation is based principally in criticism of the first and second generations, calling for increased social scientific rigor and more advanced methods to be used in research. Scholars in this generation call for more hypothesis testing, larger-N studies, more specific causal paths, and better indicators and measures. They suggest a number of possible solutions to the “too many variables, too few cases” problem. For example, Goggin^[85] suggests decreasing the number of variables to those that are absolutely crucial and increasing the number of cases. O’Toole^[92] recommends selecting cases on the basis of similarity. They also suggest accumulating data over time in order to understand the temporal element more thoroughly.^[93] Other scholars in the third generation suggest combining large-N and small-N efforts by using

large-N data to test small-N propositions. Research has not moved beyond these third generation lines of thought.

What Works: Lessons for Diversity Management

Policy implementation research has yielded a variety of conjectures and explanations for what “works” in implementation. It is this literature that offers lessons for those responsible for implementing diversity management programs in organizations. Instead of summarizing this literature on its own, I will outline five general lessons that can be drawn from this body of work and apply each to the topical area of diversity management.

The more resources devoted to diversity management programs, the more likely they are to be fully implemented.

This is a straightforward, almost intuitive consideration, but it is supported by the work of policy implementation scholars.^[88, 91, 94-96] Montjoy & O’Toole^[95] found that a specific mandate accompanied by new resources is the best way to ensure that a program is properly implemented. This can be directly applied to diversity management initiatives that might be passed down from a centralized human resources manager to mid-level managers, or from a top-level executive to mid-level managers and human resources professionals. If managers are to be expected to participate in a new management function – managing diversity – then they should be given time and resources in order to make that effort useful. If they feel that diversity management is just one more function to add to an already exhaustive list, then they will be less likely to take advantage of the program or implement it fully, choosing instead to fulfill the bare requirements or else

falsely “sign off” that the program was in place. Resources does not necessarily mean only money – time is a valuable resource for public managers, and allotting time for them to participate in diversity management, or else removing one of their other responsibilities, will make it more likely that they will come on board and fully implement the program.

The more specific the components of the program, the more likely it is to be fully implemented.

Policy implementation research has shown that the more specific and coherent a policy, the more likely it is to be implemented correctly.^[91, 97] As noted in the above review of literature on diversity management programs, such programs consist of wildly different components. The more defined these components are, the more likely the program is to be implemented correctly. Often, diversity management programs are formulated by a committee of stakeholders from across an organization, and in such cases, it is important that the committee work to offer specific suggestions and recommendations, rather than empower managers to adopt whatever strategy for diversity that they choose. For example, if one component is for managers to offer mentoring opportunities for people of color, the program might be more successful if mentoring is codified as a specific program with a centralized point person, scheduled functions, and standardized literature. Asking managers to ensure that mentoring is in place, but not setting specific guidelines, is likely to result in inconsistent efforts being made across the organization.

There should be a causal theory in place that makes an obvious link between the components of the program and the goals it seeks to achieve.

Mazmanian & Sabatier^[91] suggest that successful implementation requires a sound causal theory. Some research has shown that diversity management initiatives often result in backlash from white males and others who are not targets of the program,^[3, 5] which makes a causal theory particularly salient for these types of programs. All members of the organization need to see and understand the link between the components of the program and the goals that the program seeks to achieve. Toward this end, organizers should frame the initiative in terms of organizational benefit, not individual benefit, and communicate to employees the logic behind the points of the diversity program. In short, the program should make sense to everybody. In order to be most effective, those responsible for creating the diversity management program should become familiar with the relevant research on diversity, such that the best strategies are chosen for managing it. It is not adequate for those formulating a diversity initiative to simply reflect upon their own experience in the workplace and assume that what worked for them will work for others. Diversity management initiatives should find their root in theory and empirical research, not “war stories.”

Communication related to the program should be clear, consistent, frequently repeated, and articulated from credible sources.

Goggin et al.^[94] note the importance of communication by organizational leaders, and others make similar suggestions relating to the consistency of the messages sent and credibility of the senders.^[95, 97] This is particularly important for a program like diversity management, for several reasons. First, if the program is not clearly and consistently communicated, then employees are likely to believe it is simply rhetoric designed to

fulfill some legalistic affirmative action requirement. As such, they will not take the program seriously, and it will not be fully implemented throughout the agency. Second, the communication should come from a credible actor, not someone who is perceived to have race or gender as “an agenda.” In order to prevent white male backlash, the messages should be clearly supported by key executives. A memo or announcement from the human resources manager will not be adequate. While diversity management programs are typically housed as a human resources function, if they are characterized as such in messages sent to employees, then the organization will think of the diversity initiative as “just another HR thing” that requires minimal attention. Diversity initiatives should come from the top of the organization in order to be perceived as credible and worthwhile.

While the program should be implemented from the top down, support should be garnered from all levels of the organization during the formulation stage.

Goggin et al.^[94] recommend garnering local support at the bottom level, but others note that centralization is important for implementation success.^[96] It is vital that diversity management programs be articulated strongly from the highest possible level in the organization. If the initiative comes from the human resources management office with no show of support from the upper ranks, employees will be less likely to take the program seriously and implement it fully. As noted above, employees must understand that the diversity program is legitimate and not something that can be tossed aside, and centralized program formulation is the best way to achieve this. Decentralizing responsibility down to lower ranks will lead to inconsistent implementation, with only those who are “cheerleaders” for the program choosing to actually develop it.

Nevertheless, diversity is a touchy issue, and organizations must be careful not to formulate a program without consulting from stakeholders at all levels of the organization. Employees will be more likely to participate in a program if they feel like they have some ownership of it, and so managers must be involved in the process from the beginning. This could take the form of a task force appointed by a key executive, or stakeholder interviews conducted by a third party who would present summary recommendations for how the program should run. With diversity, organizations must be careful to get the views and suggestions of all types of employees, not just those that key executives think might benefit most from diversity management.

Conclusion

Diversity management has become an important component of many public organizations, with large amounts of resources devoted to their formulation and implementation. This paper reviews the literature on diversity in public organizations and policy implementation, deriving five lessons that can be taken from policy implementation research and applied to the implementation of diversity management programs. This is, of course, not an exhaustive list, but five important, broad issues to consider in the context of diversity management.

The field of public management should work to understand more about how diversity management programs operate. There is very little empirical research about what works (and doesn't) in diversity management, despite the proliferation in the number of programs being implemented. Research should work to understand more about the nature of diversity in the workplace and what it means to manage it.

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