

Before Prescribing Diversity Remedy, Diagnose Your Organization's Ills

It is a natural tendency to jump right in and start implementing diversity programs, particularly the ones that you've heard other legal employers have used effectively. However, it is imperative to understand the specific diversity issues at work in your organization in order to customize your approach. While there are many common challenges within legal employers, each organization has its own culture and as a result may have different priorities with respect to diversity and inclusion.

At the January 18th monthly diversity working session, signatory firms and legal departments participated in an interactive session analyzing a case study with examples of demographic, benchmarking, survey, and interview data.

Rationales for Diversity Assessments

- ❖ Listen and Learn
 - Identify the key diversity issues for specific demographic groups and levels
 - Gauge readiness for change and buy-in for diversity efforts
 - ❖ Communicate and Demonstrate
 - Convey that diversity is an important issue to the organization and its leadership
 - ❖ Evaluate
 - Establish a baseline for measuring future progress against diversity goals
 - Benchmark against other legal employers
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Four Ways to Gather Diversity Data

When designing an assessment plan, it is important to keep in mind that different individuals are compelled to action by different types of data. While some individuals are convinced by numbers, others are motivated by stories and quotes, and others by competitive pressure. Demographic data tells you what your firm looks like, while the survey and interview data helps you understand why. Therefore, it is best to take a multi-faceted approach, even if each phase isn't taken all at once.

1. Demographic Data

- Assess the "inputs," in terms of the diversity of entry level and lateral hires, including a comparison to the pool of available talent
- Assess the "outputs," such as turnover by year and the make-up of the leadership

2. Employee Survey

- Quantify the satisfaction and commitment of your organization's employees
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your diversity initiative by setting a baseline and then re-administering the survey on a regular basis over time

3. Interviews and Focus Groups

- Delve into the issues facing specific demographic groups and levels
- Identify concrete recommendations

Provide a voice to demographic groups in a safe space for candid discussion

4. Exit Interviews

Contact valued attorneys who have left your organization to understand the real reasons they left and where they ended up

Confirm or deny the common wisdom regarding why certain demographic groups leave your organization

Key Questions

As you review your data, it is useful to ask yourself the following questions:

What is your organization doing well? Relative to other legal employers as well as where you've made progress over time.

What are the biggest challenges your organization faces? What are the highest priority issues to address?

What are your internal successes? Which practice groups or office locations are leading the way in your organization? Which groups are lagging behind?

From Information To Action

Many of the issues raised in the data collection need careful deliberation and planning to design and execute the appropriate action. However, there are generally some relatively simple ideas which can be immediately implemented. These "quick wins" can be an important tool to signal that your organization takes the input from the assessment seriously and buys time until the longer term strategies are put into place. Finally, diversity assessments set up an expectation that recommendations will lead to action. Therefore, it's important to follow-through with implementation of diversity activities suggested in the sessions.

To learn more about conducting diversity assessments or upcoming diversity working sessions, please see our website at www.abcny.org or contact Meredith Moore, Director of ABCNY's Office for Diversity at mmoore@abcny.org.