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Workforce diversity programs: A case study of the Las Vegas Valley Water District's "3-year diversity implementation plan"

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Workforce Diversity Programs:
A Case Study of the Las Vegas Valley Water District's
"3-year Diversity Implementation Plan"

By

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity programs have become a popular topic in today's workforce. Diversity has become an important factor in the success of an organization. More and more agencies are beginning to realize that the workforce is becoming more diverse, and organizations are starting to embrace this diversity. Organizations are beginning to understand that diversity adds to the production and to the success of the organization, and is not a negative setback. Many agencies are realizing that diversity includes all employees, and is no longer just a racial issue. Diversity is the makeup of the world, and there are many dimensions of it.

Agencies have begun to take heed to the importance of diversity, by implementing diversity programs in their organizations. Many have hired consultants to analyze their organizations, and to make suggestions as to what is needed to make their company more diverse. Diversity programs have been viewed as the extension of Affirmative Action (Koone 2001). However, diversity programs are not as negatively viewed upon as Affirmative Action has been in the past. The need to be diverse has grown in the workforce, and organizations are learning to become more sensitive towards the various make-ups of their employees (Loden 1996). As a result, training programs have been implemented to educate employees on what diversity is, and how it applies to them.

Organizations have begun to seek out the diverse needs of their employees, and implement a program that bests suites the culture of their organization. In choosing a diversity program, it is important for employees to see

"results" from the program, and not be misled by the employer. Therefore, agencies should anticipate on a long-term commitment to a diversity program (Loden 1996).

Diversity programs are different from Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity programs (Slack 1997). Diversity programs concentrates less on numbers and more on the inclusion of all employees. Many organizations promote diversity programs as an outgrowth effort that seeks to maximize the potential of every individual. Due to the negative connotation that has been associated with Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity programs, many organizations have chosen to adopt the idea of a diversity program, in hopes to produce the same results with less adversity.

The Las Vegas Valley Water District (the District) is one of the leading organizations in Nevada that is practicing, implementing and learning about the importance of workforce diversity. In the year 2000, the Water District hired an outside consultant to conduct a study on diversity efforts at the District. Randomly selected employees received a questionnaire about diversity at the District, and were encouraged to participate in the study. The results of the study were then distributed to the employees. Employees were able to see the District's need for improvement in diversity, and the plans the District had for implementing a diversity program.

The purpose of this paper is to determine the effectiveness of the diversity plan implemented at the District, by reviewing several components that are imperative to the success of the plan. First, I will review the literature of

successfully implemented diversity programs, and the important factors that are

necessary to be reviewed prior to the implementation of a diversity plan.

Secondly, I will discuss the District's Workforce Diversity Program and what it

entails. Based on a case study, this paper will underline the effectiveness of

diversity programs.

Finally, I will discuss the findings from this study, and the implications and

recommendations for the Las Vegas Valley Water District's diversity plan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History and Background of Diversity Programs

Since the 1960's many federally sponsored equal employment laws have

been enacted. These laws prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on age,

color, disability, veteran status, national origin, race religion and sex. While these

equal opportunity laws encourage nondiscrimination based on certain dimension

of diversity, they do not offer specific guidelines for correcting historic patterns of

exclusion and discrimination when found in an organization (Loden 1996).

In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was introduce by the federal government,

which prohibited discrimination in employment based on race national origin,

color, sex and religion by employers of 15 or more employees (Guy, Newman

1998). By 1978, the Civil Service Reform Act mandated that the federal

personnel system implement policies, which would employ a productive

workforce, that was reflective of the nation's diverse population (Pomerleau

1994). The Civil Rights Act of 1991 helped to strengthen the scope and

effectiveness of federal civil rights protections, and provided additional

protections against unlawful discrimination in the workplace (Guy, Newman 1998). In the midst of the development of these civil rights laws, the idea of Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity begin to grow.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act contains broad prohibitions against certain acts of employment discrimination. The more specific and measurable requirements pertaining to equal employment are found in the Executive Order 11246 (29 C.F.R 2477 as amended), which was signed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 (Yakura 1996). This order applies specifically to the federal contractors and subcontractors, which required that these employees take affirmative action to ensure that applicants… and employees are treated… without regard to their race, color, religion, sex or national origin (Yakura 1996). Affirmative Action at this time was seen as "a set of specific and result oriented procedures to which a contractor commits itself to apply every good faith effort," (Yakura 1996). The Affirmative Action plan usually reviewed the organization's employment practices, a statistical comparison of the current workforce to the available labor pool to see if there is "underutilization," and the establishment of goals and timetables (Yakura 1996).

Shortly after President Johnson mandated Affirmative Action, a great deal of controversy began to arise concerning this law. Affirmative Action was viewed as a proactive effort to diversify the workplace, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and physical capabilities (Riccucci 1998). Affirmative Action began to raise questions about "quotas" and the idea of reverse discrimination (Riccucci 1998). Furthermore, the federal government supported Affirmative Action until 1981,

when President Ronald Regan took office. Regan was the first President that was willing to dismantle Affirmative Action altogether, and restrict the use of Equal Employment Opportunity (Riccuci 1998). While in office, Regan tried a number of ways to undermine Affirmative Action and Civil Rights policies in general. However, Regan's efforts did not fully eradicate Affirmative Action, but he was successful in disrupting its use (Riccucci 1998).

Furthermore, the Civil Rights law was amended again in 1991. During this time, President Clinton vowed not to end Affirmative Action and ordered the first major revision of Affirmative Action programs. No action had been taken for or against Affirmative Action programs since the Regan administration (Riccucci 1998). Subsequently, due to the indecisiveness by the government on whether to uphold or oppose Affirmative Action, mixed messages began to be sent by public and private sector employers that have been pursuing diversity programs. Employers where unclear about the direction of Affirmative Action programs and what opposition they should take on it.

The government and the public have viewed Affirmative Action as both a negative and a positive program. Furthermore, the uncertainty of the government on Affirmative Action has left employers in disarray. The idea of both Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws has caused a seemingly contradictory nature of federal guidelines (Slack 1997). Employers were first required to remain color and gender-blind in making hiring and promotion decisions by the Equal Employment Opportunity law, yet Affirmative Action guidelines call for color and gender consciousness (Slack 1997). These two laws

have distinct differences and caused a great dilemma in organizations. The dilemma is, that Human Resources and managers must comply simultaneously with both sets of guidelines, which represent two distinct sets of values (Slack 1997).

The Transition from AA/EEO to Diversity Programs

The resolution to enhancing workplace diversity may not lie in dismantling Affirmative Action results or programs, because although this program is controversial it provides a foundation for development (Slack 1997). The intent of this program was to establish a truly representative bureaucracy, which must remain a sacred principle to the public. Furthermore, the concept for Affirmative Action becomes the antecedent to the concept of full spectrum diversity (Slack 1997). The objective of full spectrum diversity is more than focusing on protecting a single group who has been victims of discrimination in the workplace. Full spectrum diversity also focuses on the contributions of members of all groups regardless of how they define themselves (Slack 1997). A shift in the paradigm is required to accomplish the transition from Affirmative Action to full spectrum diversity.

Organizations are realizing that diversity programs are more inclusive, and embrace the differences of everyone without concentrating on a single group (Thomas, Woodruff 1999). Organizations have focused on "celebrating differences," the implication being that all differences are good. (Thomas, Woodruff 1999). During the 1990's it was estimated that 75 percent of those entering into the workforce would be minorities and women (McNemey 1994).

Therefore organizations have no other alternative then to embrace diversity, and use it to their advantage. Diversity is here to stay, and managing it can create an environment, which will allow every individual to work (McNemey 1994).

Differences between Full Spectrum Diversity and Affirmative Action

Diversity	Affirmative Action
- Proactive - Concern about all groups in the community including members of underutilized groups. - Recognition of diversity with the individual - Value of merit and the value of diversity: competitive - Internally-driven factors	- Reactive - Concern for members of underutilized groups - Simplifications and stereotyping - Value of merit and the value of diversity: noncompetitive - Externally-driven factors

James D. Slack, Review of Public Administration Fall 1997 page 82

Employers are beginning to adopt diversity programs rapidly. Employers recognize that there is a need for some type of Affirmative Action program that is more positively viewed upon and inclusive.

When an organization decides to adopt a diversity program, it is essential to first define "diversity" in their organization. Each definition of diversity depends on the individual or the organizations' comfort level. Human Resource managers and leaders need to be clear on what managing diversity does and does not mean (Jenner 1994). There are generally two levels of diversity, which are divided into primary and secondary dimensions. (Baytos 1995; Loden 1996).

*The **primary dimensions** of diversity are characteristics, which are inborn and immutable. These are:*

- Gender
- Race
- Country of origin
- Age
- Physical challenge
- Sexual Orientation

These six criteria are viewed as primary dimensions that impact individual values, opinions and perceptions of self and others at work. (Loden 1996).

*The **secondary dimensions** of diversity are virtually limitless array of individual characteristics. A few of these characteristics that are associated with life in our organizations include the following:*

- Education

- Work Experience
- Marital/parental status
- Functional specialty
- Location
- Religion
- Problem solving approach
- Leadership Style
- Communication Style
- First Language
- Military Experience
- Organization role and level
- Income

These secondary dimensions play an important role in shaping our values, expectations and experiences. These dimensions also tend to be more mutable, less visible to those around us, and are more variable in the degree of influence they exert on our individual lives (Loden 1996).

After diversity is defined by the organization, they must then define the vision for diversity success (Baytos 1995). The organization has to determine how it is going to measure the success of the plan, and set goals to reach.

There are seven key actions organizations need to take in designing and implementing successful strategies and programs (Baytos 1995). These key actions are as follows:

- Develop a strategic perspective to guide your efforts
- Prepare yourself for diversity leadership
- Secure commitment based on a clear business rationale
- Focus the organization for diversity success

- Use creditable diversity research to identify issues

- Move quickly from research to priorities, to action plans

- Measure diversity progress and maintain momentum (Baytos 1995).

Organizations need to ask the questions, which stands to gain and lose if desired objectives are accomplished (Gardenwartz, Rowe 1998).

Diversity programs confront human nature and our willingness to change (Gardenwartz, Rowe 1998). Often this is the reason why diversity programs are unsuccessful. Organizations need to review all cost and benefits of diversity programs. When people begin to see diversity as enhancing their ability to compete and win, then they are less likely to offer resistance (Koone 2001).

The Trends in Diversity Programs

Both public and private agencies have implemented diversity programs in their organizations. The "Workforce 2000 Report," predicated that only about 15 percent of new entrants into the American workforce are white males. The rest is a mix of Hispanics, Africans, Vietnamese, Chinese, Russians, Europeans and others (Koone 2001). Almost two-thirds of new entrants in the workforce are women, and 61 percent of all women will have paying jobs in the year 2000. Non-whites will make up 29 percent of new entrants into the workforce by the year 2000, and Hispanics will be the fastest growing and most numerically significant ethnicity entering into the workforce (Hudson Institute Study 2000).

Many public organizations have begun to mirror successful diversity programs by private agencies. Agencies such as Charles Schwab and Company,

and IBM have robust leadership development initiative to recruit, develop and promote women and minority managers for advancement (Koone 2001). Schwab's program – "Build a Culture; No Ceilings, No Barriers, No Limits, has been an essential part of its operating philosophy for more than 20 years (Koone 2001). Also, at IBM, 38 percent of the worldwide management council (top management) consists of women, minorities and non-U.S. born people (Koone 2001). IBM's executive sourcing process focuses on leadership development and succession planning, which specifically targets women and minorities (Koone 2001).

Other organizations such as Apple, EDS, AOL, Time Warner, AT&T, Ben and Jerry's and Eddie Bauer also support career planning, coaching and professional development for minority groups.

The success of a diversity program can be determined in many ways. At, IBM every manager is exposed to diversity training as a part of the leadership development curriculum. The theme of the training emphasizes on why a diverse workforce is critical in meeting the needs of a diverse marketplace (Koone 2001).

Fannie May also has a successful program, which entails corporate training, including leadership development, which contains a robust diversity component. Fannie May's diversity training has evolved over the years, and is redeveloped every three years to meet the needs of the market (Koone 2001).

Diversity has definitely become the buzzword in the year 2002. It is more apparent then ever that in order for organizations to be successful in the coming years, some type of diversity initiative is necessary. Many organizations have

identified that a diversity program confronts the needs of both the internal and external customer, by addressing the diverse market and the needs of the employees.

THE LAS VEGAS VALLEY WATER DISTRICT
Workforce Diversity

The Las Vegas Valley Water District (the District) is the water provider for the Las Vegas Valley. The District's history dates back to 1905, when it was then called the Las Vegas Land and Water Company. The District is a public utility with approximately 1,220 employees. It is a quasi-municipality that is governed by the Board of Directors (the Clark County Commissioners). The Board of Directors appoints the General Manager, to carry out the day-to-day operations of the District. Below is the current organizational chart of the District**.**

The Las Vegas Valley Water District provides water to more than 800,000 people in Southern Nevada. The Districts provides water services for the unincorporated Clark County, Las Vegas, Blue Diamond, Jean, Kyle Canyon and Search Light. According to the 2000 Census, the population in Clark County totaled 1,375,765 residents. That population was composed of 72 percent Caucasian, 9 percent African American, 0.8 percent American Indian and Alaskan Native, 5.3 percent Asian, 0.5 percent Pacific Islander and 22 percent Hispanic or Latino. The District, serves about 60 percent of the total Clark County population (US Census Bureau 2000).

The District's mission is as follows: To provide a safe reliable water supply and serve our customers in a responsible manner. The vision of the District is to become "Leaders in Service," by upholding the values of the organization. These values are: respect for people, integrity, service and excellence.

In the year 2000, the Las Vegas Valley Water District conducted a diversity study. It was a study that was initiated by a questionnaire on the performance review process at the District. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding diversity at the District, and how the employees viewed equal opportunity among under-represented groups. The results of the diversity section of the questionnaire were compelling enough for the District to initiate a separate study on diversity issues in the organization.

The District hired an outside consultant, who conducted a random survey on diversity concerns, and formed a focus group to address those concerns that existed in the organization. The consultant then complied the information

collected, into a packet that was distributed to all employees during the General Manager's Briefing in February 2001. This information consisted of the District's definition of diversity, and the diversity plan that was adopted in the 2001.

The District defines the dynamics of diversity in relation to the culture of the organization. The District's definition of diversity states,

> Diversity is achieved in an organization when its culture (the way we do business here) facilitates a working environment where all employees feel recognized, valued, appreciated and when their unique talents are utilized. Diversity represents a mosaic: a variety of employees' backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs. Organizational Diversity is achieved at a work unit or interpersonal employee interaction level when this variety is seen as a strength versus a liability (LVVWD 2001).

The District defined the dimensions of diversity, which impacts their agency. These dimensions are divided into "seen" and "unseen" components. The District defines "seen" dimensions of diversity as: age, race, gender, physical abilities, ethnicity, weight and height. "Unseen" dimensions of diversity is defined as: religious beliefs, political affiliations, union/exempt, geographic region, education, socio-economic status, marital status, ethnicity, personality/styles, sexual orientation, language, mental disabilities, management/staff, part-time/full-time, native/non-native and field/office (LVVWD General Manager's Briefing 2001). These dimensions were found in the culture of the District, and encompass the diverse make-up of the environment.

The District's "Diversity Implementation 3-Year Plan" was launched in fiscal year 2001 and set to conclude in 2003. This plan consists of the following 10 initiatives that will be implemented in the next 3 years (LVVWD 2001).

1. Harassment and Discrimination training for all employees (2001/2002).

2. Field Office/Front Line employees - have e-mail access, and periodic articles viewing their contribution to the District (2001).

3. Career Advancement – Employee training class on interviewing and testing skills, filling out applications, and the selection process (2001).

4. Sexual Orientation – discrimination and harassment policies to include sexual orientation; bereavement and sick leave to include the care of domestic partners (2001).

5. Positive Feedback – Management form on positive feedback (2001).

6. Empowerment – Create empowerment teams to implement work principles (2002)

7. Diversity Training – Design a mandatory District specific diversity-training workshop for all employees, and a separate class for management (2002).

8. Core Curriculum for Management Development- Design a three-year training program that integrates HR classes recommended through the diversity report (2001-2003).

9. Policies and Procedures – Update policies and procedures and put them on the Intranet for ease in access and updates (2002).

10. Diversity Council – Form Diversity Council, a management employee group to promote diversity at the District (2001).

The 3-year plan addressed the issues found in the study conducted, and represents a commitment to diversity at the District. The primary component of the plan is the diversity council. The council works directly with the Human Resources Department to oversee, and ensure that the diversity plan is being implemented at the District. The diversity council members represent the departments, employee and management ranks, field and office staff, races, nationalities, gender, gay-tolerant, and long time and newer employees. The council is required to make a 3-5 year commitment to diversity, and will work to improve diversity awareness at the District.

RESEARCH METHOD

To evaluate the effectiveness of the diversity plan, I interviewed the key stakeholders in this program. These stakeholders are the employees, Human Resources, management and the Diversity Council. These four stakeholders are imperative in determining the success or the failure of this program. The employees' are the key evaluators of the success of this plan. They are directly affected by the implementation of this plan, and will determine if senior management is really enforcing diversity, and what changes have occurred. Human Resources is in charge of recruiting, hiring and promoting in a diverse manner. While implementing these practices, HR has to be mindful of diversity issues, the laws that enforce diversity, and how they can be more diverse in their practices. Management is responsible for ensuring diversity among their subordinates, by embracing diversity in their departments. The Diversity

Council's role is to be the voice for employees. They represent the needs of employees to senior management, and ensure that the diversity plan remains intact.

I interviewed a total of 11 District employees about the newly implemented 3-year plan, and their feelings on diversity at the District. I selected the interviewees that represented different ethnicities, cultures, genders, positions and educational backgrounds. The interviewees were asked questions about their awareness of the program, and the impact of the program on the organization (see Appendix: B for questions). The employees consisted of 2 Human Resource staff members, 2 diversity council members, 2 department managers, and 5 full-time permanent employees.

Furthermore, I collected the agency's data regarding the diversity plan, and the projects that have been implemented since the plan was introduced in February 2001. Statistical information on the current diversity status of the organization was also collected, in order to review the present make-up of the organization, and what changes will be made in the future.

In addition to the above, I also observed a diversity council meeting. As an observer, I was able to see the groups' commitment to diversity at the District, and their dedication to enhancing the awareness of diversity and its meaning.

FINDINGS

Over the years, the Las Vegas Valley Water District has strengthened its commitment to diversity. Diversity has taken on a new identity, and has been viewed as a positive asset to the organization. The District has proven its

commitment to diversity by adopting a diversity plan that will ensure

inclusiveness of all employees.

Demographic Data

Table 1 reflects the breakdown of employees by ethnicity. According to the

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission form (EEO-4) in 2001, the District

had 1,224 employees, and 71 percent of the employees were of Caucasian

descent. The minorities only made-up 29 percent of the population, and out of

1,224 employees only 428 were women. Caucasian males alone composed of

nearly 50 percent of the employees at the District.

LVVWD Employee Statistics

4%

1%

7%

16%

72%

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaskan Native

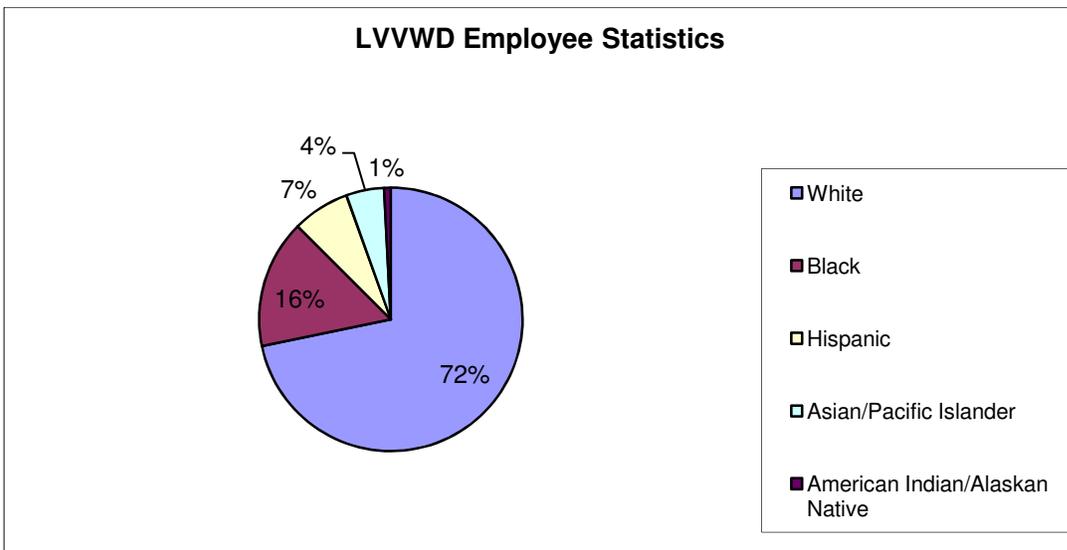**Table 1 LVVWD.** *(Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, State and Local*
Government Information (EEO-4) 2001)

The EE0-4 statistics also showed that out of 56 managerial positions, only

4 were held by minorities, and 17 held by females (See Table 2). Caucasian

males composed of 63 percent of the managerial/administrative positions. In

1999, there were a total of 50 managerial/administrative positions, of which 2

Caucasian males and 4 Caucasian females were hired/promoted into with in the last two years. However, the ethnicity statistics remained the same, reflecting that in the last two years, no other races were hired into managerial/administrative positions.

Managerial/Administrative Positions

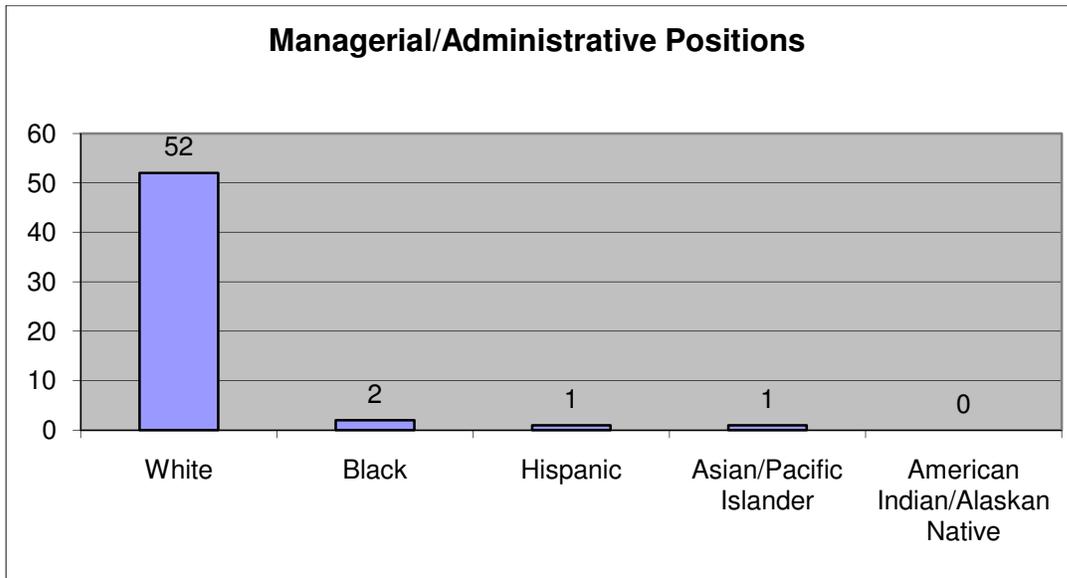| Category	Value
White	52
Black	2
Hispanic	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0

Table 2 LVVWD. *(Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, State and Local Government Information (EEO-4) 2001)*

In 2001, there were a total of 111 new hires, of which 44 were females and 67 were males. Also, 73 percent of the new hires were of Caucasian descent, and only 27 percent were minorities (See Table 3). Furthermore, 66 percent of the new hires were men.
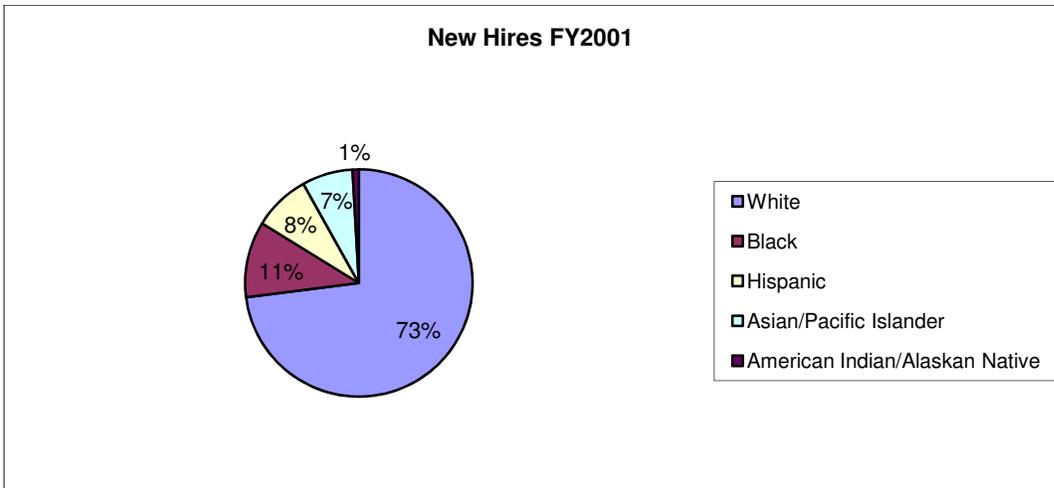
New Hires FY2001

- 73% White
- 11% Black
- 8% Hispanic
- 7% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native

Legend:
- ■ White
- ■ Black
- □ Hispanic
- □ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ■ American Indian/Alaskan Native

Table 3 LVVWD. *(Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, State and Local Government Information (EEO-4) 2001)*

From this demographic data it is clear that the minority percentage is very low, and the employee statistics are in line with the hiring statistics. Only 27 percent of the new hires were minorities in the last fiscal year, and 29 percent of the total numbers of employees were minorities. Additionally, in 2001 about three-fourths of the current employees, and new hires at the District were Caucasian men and women. Women made-up only 35 percent of the total number of employees at the District last year, and 40 percent of the new hires.

Interview Data

Implementation of New Plan

In my research, I discovered that the "3-year Diversity Implementation Plan," is not the first time the District attempted to implement a diversity program (Interview 1 2002). According to an employee, the program implemented in the past was not well received by the employees, and did not match the culture of the organization. Furthermore, no changes were made, and employees grew

pessimistic about diversity programs. Employees have not recovered from the failure of the last diversity program, and feel that the current program is "just talk," according to another employee (Interview 2 2002). "The plan may have good intentions, but the District is still missing the mark of full diversity," an employee stated (Interview 3 2002). It is clear that the District has a challenge ahead of them, with the new diversity plan. Additionally, another employee stated that, "The District has achieved job diversity, yet they still need to work on being ethnically diversified," (Interview 3 2002). The District will need to continually strive to prove its commitment to diversity, in order to regain its credibility among the employees.

Employees were introduced to the diversity plan in 2001, at the General Manager's briefing. Projects for the plan had already begun, and the plan's blue prints were distributed to the employees at the briefing. Although, the plan is currently in the works by Human Resources and the senior management team, an employee felt that no progress has been made (Interview 1 2002). Moreover, another employee stated that, "In order for the employees to buy into it, the idea needs feeling and conviction behind it," (Interview 3 2002). Due to extended gap between the introduction of the plan in 2001, and now, employees forgot the plan even existed, and do not identify with it, an employee explained (Interview 2 2002). The plan is approaching its 3-year mark in 2003, and employees are questioning what has been accomplished. The plan has not been expedited, and is a slow process, an employee expressed (Interview 2 2002). Employees have yet to see any changes from the plan. The plan has not been effectively

communicated to the employees, for them to feel optimistic about it. Employees are not aware of what the plan entails, and the projections for the future. Furthermore, employees are lacking a true understanding of diversity and what it means. Furthermore, an employee felt that many are still associating its definition with affirmative action, and they are unaware of the differences between the two terms (Interview 2 2002).

Management's Role in the Plan

Management's role in the plan is essential to the plan's success. "If management truly shows a concern for diversity in the organization, then it can be an effective program," an employee expressed (Interview 2 2002). Another employee explained that, without management's support it will be viewed as public relations work, and an attempt for the District to look good on paper (Interview 1 2002). Leadership will play an integral part in the effectiveness of the diversity plan. Senior management will be the determining factor of how well enforced this plan will be. Furthermore, the make-up of the senior management team needs to also be diverse. "Our senior management team wants members that look like them, with the same background and education," a manager stated (manager interview 1 2002). Additionally, another manager felt the same, and agreed that the senior management team is clearly lacking minorities (manager interview 2 2002). The senior management team is composed of the General Manager, 2 Deputy General Managers and, 12 directors.

Furthermore, a manager felt that the senior management team has achieved diversity for genders, but minorities are not represented in the group (manager 1 interview 2002). "More minority managers will bring a lot of credibility to the District," a manger stated (manager interview 2 2002). Both managers felt that the minority employees are watching carefully to see if the District utilizes its opportunity to fill one of the three open director positions with a minority (manager 1 2002, manager 2, 2002).

It became very apparent to the senior management team the importance of diversity in December 2001, when a black female chemist was awarded $80,000 in damages in her racial harassment case against the District (RJ 2001). The District was embarrassed by this event, and learned a hard public lesson about diversity. As a result of this incident, the diversity plan is essential to the credibility of the organization.

Recruitment and Promotion

Although, the District has been diverse in its hiring practices, there still seems to be a "glass ceiling" in the organization. Promotion opportunity appears to be the biggest concern for all employees. An employee stated that, "Employees morale is so low, because the District does not promote from within. The District often uses employees for "interim" positions, but look outside to fill the positions employees are already doing," (Interview 2 2002). Furthermore, promotion opportunities are especially crucial for minorities. Minorities are under-represented in managerial/administrative positions at the District. The District currently has 56 managerial/administrative positions, of which minorities hold 4.

Managerial/administrative positions have become the target area for

diversity improvement, the Human Resource Director explained (HR Director

2002). The Human Resource Analyst also stated that, "The District will have to

take affirmative steps to have a more diverse workforce," (HR Analyst 2002).

Although, affirmative action is distinctly different from the diversity program,

affirmative steps will be necessary in order to improve these numbers, explained

by the HR Analyst (HR Analyst 2002). Furthermore, the Director also elucidated

that some of the same affirmative action measurements will be used in the

diversity program for different reasons (HR Director 2002). However, the Director

explained that, the diversity program would concentrate more on the inclusion of

all employees, and acknowledging the talents of all individuals (HR Director

2002).

The new diversity plan has changed recruitment efforts towards minorities.

The District has become more aggressive in attracting minorities to the

organization. There is now a reemphasizes on diversity in the organization, in an

effort to increase the number of minorities and women employees, indicated by

the HR Analyst (HR Analyst 2002). The HR department is beginning to advertise

jobs in minority publications and on minority Internet sites. The recruitment efforts

have also begun to focus more on community involvement, by educating inter-

city high schools students about career opportunities at the District, and hosting

community wide job fairs. Moreover, the Analyst stated that, "The success of the

diversity program will result in more women and minorities interwoven into this

organization. All of our opinions and styles will be brought together to help shape the way the District operates," (HR Analyst 2002).

Role of the Council

The Diversity Council has been working diligently to resolve some of the diversity issues at the District. The council is composed of 17 full-time permanent District employees that were selected to commit 3-5 years to this program. The councils' preliminary mission statement is as follows:

> The Diversity Council is a volunteer group of employees who represent a variety of viewpoints, positions, departments, and differences in the Las Vegas Valley Water District. We have a personal and professional long-term commitment to Diversity. We define "Diversity" as the mosaic of people who bring a variety of backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs as assets to the groups and organizations with which they interact. Diversity is achieved when all members of an organization feel recognized, valued, appreciated and when their unique talents are utilized. We exist to assist the LVVWD in advancing Diversity in all aspects of its organizational life, internal to our organization and external to our water users and the community we serve. We will work at all levels (Department, inter-department, community, District wide, etc.) to be Diversity change advocates, facilitators of difference, Diversity experts to be called upon for ideas, options, and recommendations, and sponsors of specific Diversity projects. We will embody our work by upholding the District's code of ethics, by modeling Diversity values of inclusion and acceptance, and by holding the District's highest good in all that we do (LVVWD General Manger Briefing 2001).

The council hopes to shed light on diversity at the District. "Many of the employees do not understand the plan, and do not understand the council's role," stated a council member (Council Member 1 2002). The council will provide diversity education and training for employees. A council member also explained how in the next year, the employees will start to see the diversity plan being implemented internally and externally (Council Member 2 2002). The council will work directly with senior management to help resolve diversity issues. Currently, the council has 4 projects in progress that will address diversity issues (Diversity Council 2002 Project Plan). These projects are as follows:

- Speaker's Bureau - By the end of 2002, Diversity Council members will make presentations about diversity and activities in the council to each department at lease once a year during their departmental meeting.

- Internal Job Fair – In October 2002, the Diversity Council will sponsor a one-day internal job fair, which will help to expose employees to a variety of positions and career options.

- Communication Channels For Diversity – By the end of 2002, the council will provide a diversity page on the District's Intranet site. This page will include a diversity statement, resources, a diversity calendar etc. There will also be an Internet site accessible to the community, which will contain information on the diversity program.

- Employee Appreciation Day – will integrate a diversity theme into the day, and will include information on the diverse cultures and ethnicities.

The council presented these projects along with their recommendations to the senior management team, which were approved, and well received by the team, stated a council member (Diversity Council 2002 Project Plan). "Senior management was very receptive of the recommendations, and the projects we presented. However, the biggest challenge lies with the supervisors and managers, and them implementing diversity amongst their staff," another council member expressed (Council Member 2). Senior management is also scheduled to begin diversity training in April 2002.

The District is also supporting diverse activities. Some of these activities include: Employee Appreciation Day, Black History Celebration, empowerment efforts, Minority/Women Business Enterprise contractors/small business, child-care options, intern programs, Hispanic outreach and citizen committees. Many of the council members are involved in these activities, which is another phase of educating the employees about diversity. Furthermore, a council member stated that, "The success of the program will be determined by the council's education efforts. Even if we only change the attitudes and thinking of 5 employees, that will still be considered a success," (Council Member 2 2002).

Overall, the District is working on improving diversity awareness in the organization. It was clear in my observation at the diversity council meeting, that there is a strong effort on behalf of the members to implement this plan. The

members feel passionate about diversity at the District, and many have experienced discrimination in either their professional and/or personal lives. The members seem to have a good working relationship amongst each other, and the senior management team. Their commitment to diversity will be the driving force of this program. They appear to be up to the challenge, and have prepared themselves professionally and personally for the council. The council members have also participated in a diversity training sessions that have heightened their self-awareness of what diversity is and what it means. The preparation of the council was the first priority of the diversity plan, so that the members will be an effective liaison between the employees and senior management. Furthermore, the diversity plan is very much in effect, and is still in the preliminary stages.

Nonetheless, the process of the diversity council, and the status of the plan need to be communicated to the employees. Employees have been left in the dark, and uninformed on the plan's progress. Therefore, employees are pessimistic about the implementation of the plan, and the perceived goals. Furthermore, 9 of the 11 employees I interviewed said they were either unaware of the plan, or did not understand it. The employees also questioned the sincerity and the seriousness of the plan, because it has not been truly enforced. The 11 employees interviewed, felt it was imperative for the District to make the plan known publicly and internally. Moreover, in order for the plan to be effective it is necessary to inform all employees about the plan, and what it entails.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The Las Vegas Valley Water District clearly has many challenges to face ahead, with the implementation of the new diversity plan. The "3-year Diversity Implementation Plan" is expected to bring about change, and a more diverse work environment. Furthermore, in my research, I found three major challenges that could definitely impact the success of this plan.

The first challenge was the lack of communication to the employees. As stated early, the plan was first introduced at the General Manager's briefing in February 2001. After it was introduced, it appeared that the District was proactive in producing a diverse organization. The diversity plan was mentioned again at the second General Manager's briefing later that year, which primarily focused on the selection of the Diversity Council Members. In the initial introduction of the plan, employees were informed about what the plan entailed, and the District's commitment to diversity. However, a year later (2002) the District has lacked in updating the employees on the progression of the plan. The research revealed that the plan is still in progress, however the employees are unaware of its status. There is not a consistent communication channel (i.e., employee newsletter or Intranet site) that updates the employees on the plan. Therefore, the employees feel that no action has been taken, and it is "just talk" on the part of senior management.

Furthermore, communication channels developed in the Diversity Council are scheduled to begin at the end of 2002. However, in order to keep employees abreast and confident about this program, some form of communication is

necessary at the present moment. I would suggest the District using its internal publications to spotlight diversity, and the happenings in the Diversity Council. Additionally, I think it would be beneficial to the employees, to have access to the diversity plan via Intranet at all times.

The second challenge the District faces, is the recruitment to fill the three director positions. In the findings sections, I discussed the lack of minority managers in both senior and middle management positions. Many of the interviewees felt that the District has an opportunity to show its commitment to diversity, by filling one of the positions with a minority. Furthermore, the interviewees felt that no special treatment should be given to minorities in order to fill the position, however minorities should be recruited for the job. Based on the interviews with Human Resources, it was apparent that they too feel management is lacking minorities, and have begun to target minorities for managerial positions. Furthermore, if HR has initiated an aggressive recruitment for minorities, then this will be reflected in the filling of upcoming managerial positions. I would recommend the District continuing with the Human Resource's plan to aggressively recruit minorities. With the new diversity plan in place, this would work to their benefit to attract more minorities to the organization. By advertising job openings in minority publications and on minority web sites, the District will be displaying its commitment to improving the minority employee population.

Education was the third challenge of this program. The diversity program involves more than improving minority representation, and sponsoring cultural activities; its ultimate goal is to educate people. The primary focus of the diversity program is to educate employees on the definition of diversity and on diversity issues. The employees need to understand that the diversity program's purpose is not to single out one group, but to include everyone. Diversity represents the different talents, ideas, experiences, backgrounds and opinions of all individuals. The purpose of this program is to embrace diversity, and to encompass all of the differences that make us unique individuals. Diversity programs are often difficult to implement, because they aim to change the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. Furthermore, in order to be an effective program, the individual has to be willing to change. Education is the key to the success of this program. Employers need to be willing to take the time and money to educate employees on diversity, in order for the program to be a success.

The District has begun to take the necessary steps to educate their employees about diversity, however I do not think the employees understand the seriousness of diversity. I would recommend diversity training be required annually as part of the diversity plan. It is important to keep the employees abreast of the new happenings in the plan, as well as, reiterate the importance of the diversity program.

In conclusion, I believe that the Las Vegas Water District's "3-year Diversity Implementation Plan" could be very successful, if the District takes this

opportunity enhance its diverse environment. Embracing diversity isn't just the right thing to do; there's a strong business case for it (Koone 2001). Companies are beginning to recognize the importance of creating workplaces that look like their marketplaces, and that do not discriminate based on race, gender, age, ethnic background, religion, or sexual orientation (Koone 2001). The District is heading in the right direction in bringing diversity to the organization (manager interview 2 2002). However, the success of the diversity plan will be dependent upon the commitment leadership has to the program.

In addition, my research focused on the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees, on the diversity plan. However, it lacks the intensity that an employee survey could have provided. A survey distributed to all District employees, could have offered more insight on the employees' perception of the diversity plan. Also, an interview with the General Manager would have also afforded more insight on the leadership aspect of diversity at the District.

Finally, for further research, it would be advantageous for the District to conduct a survey at the end of the "3-year Diversity Implementation Plan," to determine what changes have occurred. This will allow the plan's effectiveness to be evaluated before and after it was implemented, and to determine its success or failure.

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Interviews

Diversity Council Member Interview 1. Groundskeeper, Las Vegas Valley Water District. February 11, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Diversity Council Member Interview 2. Secretary, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 11, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Employee Interview 1, Financial Analyst, Las Vegas Valley Water District. February 28, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Employee Interview 2, Assistant Coordinator, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 1, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Employee Interview 3, Management Technician, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 4, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Employee Interview 4, Secretary, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 6, 2002. Las Vegas, NV

Employee Interview 5, Secretary, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 4, 2002

Human Resource Interview. Human Resource Director, Las Vegas Valley Water District. February 26, 2002.

Human Resource Interview. Human Resource Analyst, Las Vegas Valley Water District. February 14, 2002.

Manger Interview 1. Manger, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 4, 2002.

Manager Interview 2. Manager, Las Vegas Valley Water District. March 8, 2002.

APPENDIX : A - Definition of Terms

Diversity – refers to individual human differences. In the context of
organizational life, diversity is about individual differences that can be drawn on
and developed to promote the goals and practices of the organization. This
definition refers to individual and group differences that contribute to distinct
social identities. (Arredondo 1996).

Workforce diversity – is a catalyst for organizational change, a composite of
multicultural human resources, a business objective, and a learning opportunity.
(Arrendondo 1996).

Diversity Council – a formation of an advisory committee or council that
collaborate with and support the mission of the diversity director. (Arrendondo
1996).

Multiculturalism – is often interchanged with diversity. Multiculturalism refers
primarily to culture, ethnicity, and race (Arrendondo1996).

Diversity Management – Refers to a strategic organizational approach to
workforce diversity development, organizational culture change, and
empowerment of the workforce. It represents a shift away from activities and
assumptions defined by affirmative action to management practices that are
inclusive, reflecting the workforce diversity and its potential. Ideally, it is a
pragmatic approach, in which participants anticipate and plan for change, do not
fear human differences or perceive them as a threat, and view the workplace as

a forum for individuals' growth and change in skills and performance with direct cost benefits to the organization. (Arrendondo 1996).

Empowerment – refers to a sense of personal power, confidence, and positive self-esteem. Empowerment involves a process of change that can be achieved in relation to specific goals (Arrendondo 1993,1996).

Diversity Initiative – is the formal process for promoting organizational culture change (Arrendondo 1996).

Diversity Training – training which aims to accelerate cooperation in multinational work teams, facilitate group learning and reduce cultural misunderstandings that might otherwise arise (Koone 2001).

APPENDIX: B – Interview Questions

Questions for Employees

1. Are you aware of the 3-year Diversity Plan, here at the District? If so, what are your feelings on it?

2. Do you feel that employees truly understand the plan?

3. What changes would you like to see develop from this plan?

4. What would you consider a successful diversity plan?

5. Do you think a diversity-training program will be effective in ensuring fair treatment for all employees?

Questions for Managers

1. What are your feelings on the 3-year Diversity Plan here at the District?

2. Do you feel that employees truly understand the plan?

3. What changes would you like to see develop from this plan?

4. What would you consider a successful diversity plan?

5. Do you think a diversity-training program will be effective in ensuring fair treatment for all employees?

6. What recommendations would you give for minorities looking to advance in their career here at the District?

7. As a manager, how do you manage diversity among your staff?

Questions for Diversity Council Members

1. What is the role of the council? What is your role as a member of the Diversity Council?

2. Do you feel that employees understand the 3-year diversity plan?

3. How will the success of the council be determined?

4. Do you feel that Senior Management has been very receptive in the implementation of this plan?

5. What is the council's vision of the future of diversity at the District?

6. How will you educate diversity issues to the employees?

7. Will diversity training be a requirement of all employees?

8. What role will the council play in ensuring that all individuals will receive equal opportunity for employment and promotion at the District?

9. What is your envision of diversity at the District?

Questions for Human Resources

1. Can you explain the role that the Human Resources Department plays in the newly implemented 3-year diversity plan at the District?

2. Has HR's role changed since the implementation of this plan?

3. What will determine the success of this plan? How does the District see itself in the future?

4. Have promotions among minorities increased since the plan?

5. Have complaints regarding discrimination decreased since the implementation of this plan? Or are employees beginning to express their feelings about diversity at the District because of this plan?

6. How is the diversity program different from affirmative action? Or is the program a replacement for affirmative action?

7. What is the Senior Management's role in this plan?