

Healthy Connection for the Future: Employee Diversity and Customer Service

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Abstract

Library staff diversity, healthy organizational climate and quality customer service are provably connected, as found in recent research at the University of Maryland and several other institutions. This session summarizes that research and its future applications and potential to organizational development in the context of a healthy organization. Finally, the hallmarks of healthy, inclusive organizations are flagged as pathfinders for the future, in internal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural dimensions.

Summary

Back to the Future

We are eager to explain a bit about the history of our topic, so we'll start with the present and trace our history for the past ten years or so. What is the present? Right now we at the University of Maryland stand proudly and gratefully too with the Association of Research Libraries and more than 15 library partners across the country as practitioners of ARL's newest program: ClimateQUAL, an ARL trademark. It is the new embodiment of what we over the years have called the Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment, or OCDA.

This calendar year we have worked with libraries at Arizona State, Cornell, Duke, Emory, Kansas State, New York University, Northwestern, University of Houston, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, as our Phase II partners to pilot the ClimateQUAL survey and further test the theory behind the survey and its connection to LibQUAL+™ results.

In 2007 we were pleased to work with the first pilot group of five libraries: Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Texas A&M, University of Connecticut. "We" is the University of Maryland Libraries, the Industrial/Organizational Psychology Program at the University of Maryland, and the Association of Research Libraries. How did we come to this desire to "go national" with the OCDA program? Primarily because we at Maryland saw the benefit of it and were eager to learn if/how it could be adapted to other libraries.

We came to this realization shortly after the University of Maryland Libraries conducted the second round of the OCDA – in 2004 -- to test the progress made with a whole suite of interventions after the findings of the initial OCDA in 2000. The 2004 version of the survey confirmed the benefits of such a systematic assessment and follow-up. The 2004 assessment was designed to measure employees' individual attitudes and beliefs, the Libraries' organizational culture, and current management practices and policies as they relate to diversity. The final report states, "These analyses revealed that there were a number of positive changes that occurred over the past four years."ⁱ

How did we know in which areas we needed to work? The obvious answer lay in the results of the first survey, conducted in 2000. The first recommendation of the researchers then was for the Libraries to be cognizant of the critical role that organizational culture plays in the effective management of all human resources and to be willing to challenge this existing culture. Various areas were highlighted for action because it had been determined, prior to the survey, with earlier focus groups and literature searches, that diversity issues are only one aspect of the whole organizational system and that it would be necessary to collect information about the general organizational culture in addition to information about diversity issues.

Other recommendations related to the diversity plan and timeframe, visible change (follow-through on the results of the survey), managerial training, standardization of procedures, recruitment and selection of ethnic minorities, empowerment and trust, library sponsorship of more social activities for employees, and increased attention to employees' perceived value of group Initiatives and advisory groups.ⁱⁱ

What prompted us to do the OCDA in the first place? In 1998 and 1999, the Libraries' Diversity Committee began planning for a diversity training component in staff development programs that would address diversity issues. First though, we had to find out if and what training was needed, so we surveyed staff. And there you have it – the first OCDA was born.

Summary of Research

Working with Maryland's Industrial/Organizational Psychology Program enabled and greatly enriched the OCDA survey development, analysis and research. From 2004 to the present, Dr. Paul Hanges and his research assistants have tested several areas:

1. The validity and reliability of the survey scales themselves,
2. The adaptability of the survey instrument to libraries in multiple institutions,
3. The transition to a Web-based survey instrument and online analysis and production of reports,
4. The testing and linking of several theories, heretofore unexplored or unproven.

We will concentrate on the latter area. First, there is an excellent summary of organizational climate research in an article by former Maryland Dean of Libraries Charles Lowry and Dr. Hanges in the journal *portal: Libraries and the Academy*:

The OCDA survey is based on information in the organizational climate research literature. Organizational climate refers to the interpretive frameworks shared by employees regarding the priorities of their organization, and it helps them understand what behavior is rewarded, supported, and expected in the organization. . . .The OCDA project extends the prior climate literature, incorporating the concept of the healthy organization. ⁱⁱⁱ

Another important research question is the connection between organizational diversity and customer service. Dr. Hanges and his research assistants point out that the empirical literature has documented positive organizational consequences for diversity, which are consistent with Benjamin Schneider's model for Attraction-Selection-Attrition, or ASA, model.^{iv} This model hypothesizes two major things:

1. that workers from diverse backgrounds should be able to anticipate and meet the demands of a diverse clientele and
2. that the long-term survivability of organizations depends on their ability to maintain the diversity of their human resources.

However, prior to the recent OCDA-based research, there was no evidence for this hypothesis. Dr. Hanges and associates argued that organizations that have developed a climate for diversity will be likelier to be effective in responding to their environments. They tested their hypotheses with the five libraries in Phase I of the OCDA program. They showed that employees' ratings of both climate for diversity and teamwork are related to customers' ratings of customer service.

How did they do this? They merged LibQUAL+™ results from the five libraries with their climate survey data. The climate survey contained measures for Climate for Diversity, Climate for Teamwork, Climates for Demographic and Deep Diversity, Group Conflict, Individual Team Climate and Climate for Customer Service. The LibQUAL+™ surveys, a service of the Association of Research Libraries, measures university faculty and student assessment of the quality of a given library's service. These library users rate the service provided by their libraries in three dimensions: Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place.

In the LibQUAL+™ surveys, consumers rate each of these dimensions in terms of their minimum,desired and perceived service satisfaction. Dr. Hanges and associates then examined the inter-correlations among the OCDA scales and the LibQUAL+™ scales of perceptions of service.

They found that all three Climate for Diversity factors were significantly related to at least one LibQUAL+™ factor. These results indicate that teams with climates for diversity are

likelier to be associated with libraries in which customers report that library employees are competent and helpful as well as associated with libraries in which customers report being able to find information in the formats of their own choosing. Interestingly though, there was no positive correlations with Library as Place.

Application of Research and Organization Development

We have described the research behind the ClimateQUAL-OCDA survey, the pilot project and research results. A critical component of the research has been to define the healthy organization and how the survey instrument can be used to help libraries understand how well they are doing in creating the healthy climate.

An organization that is diverse not only in its demographic makeup but also in its application of the diversity for ideas, values, and experiences, the healthier the organization. The healthier the organization, the better the staff are equipped to be responsive to change. Subsequently, staff are better equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

Here is an expanded definition of the healthy organization: "A healthy organization has policies, practices and procedures that empower employees and emphasize the importance of continual learning and innovation to meet the demands of an ever changing environment. It is one in which customer service, employee diversity, and organizational justice are all recognized as critical imperatives that will determine the effectiveness of the organization in the long run."^v

There are two messages that a healthy organization sends to its staff. The first is that the organization is concerned for its employees and this plays out when the policies place value on teamwork, diversity, and justice (information, etc.). The second is that the organization is concerned for its customers and this concern is delivered through the policies that reinforce a climate for customer service. When systems are put in place that improve service to customers, such as training, employees' behavior reflects a positive regard for the organization, which in turn results in positive service.

To take this a step farther, we are expanding the concept of the healthy organization to add the elements of an inclusive one. An inclusive organization is one that is able to develop strategic ways to embrace diversity and the staff. It means moving from a mono-cultural organization to a multicultural one. It is an organization that is creating a caring workplace that supports empowerment and performance. Staff have a sense of belonging and are valued for who they are as individuals. There is equity of opportunity for staff. Staff treat one another with dignity and respect. Staff have a passion for the work that they do. There is a level of energy and commitment from everyone – individually and collectively – to do their best work.^{vi}

There are four dimensions that people experience that we believe support an inclusive organization: internal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural. These dimensions are defined as follows:

Internal: this dimension is an individual's inner processes. The goal is that an individual has a sense of belonging and responsibility to the whole organization.

Interpersonal: this dimension focuses on the interactions between individuals. The goal is to create an environment where interpersonal relationships support and inspire all to learn and grow.

Cultural: this dimension centers on the interwoven pattern defining who individuals are and how they are to do things. The goal is that all stakeholders co-create a culture that works for everyone.

Institutional: this dimension is the individuals' negotiation of roles, resources, and responsibilities within given systems. The goal is to have policies and structures in place that promote ownership and leadership, which benefit everyone.^{vii}

When we map these four dimensions with the climate measures of the ClimateQUAL-OCDA survey, we are better able to analyze the results to identify strategies to support the improvement of the organization. These organizational systems, which incorporate the principles of organization development, help us focus on the most effective strategies.

Considering the various systems that occur within an organization can lead to improvement of the climate and move an organization towards a more inclusive one. Understanding the systems within the organization is to look at how parts of a whole, whether a process, an activity, or another system supports the work of the organization.^{viii} We have created a table that illustrates this mapping process. The same organizational systems can be applied to various dimensions and the climate scales.

Dimensions of Experience	ClimateQUAL™ - OCDA Scales	Organizational Systems
Internal: Individual's inner processes	Climate for psychological safety	Teams and work groups
Interpersonal: interactions between individuals	Climate for interpersonal treatment Climate for innovation Climate for leadership	Communication Teams and work groups
Cultural: Interwoven pattern defining who individuals are and how they are to do things	Climate for demographic diversity Climate for deep diversity Climate for innovation	Communication Recruitment/Retention Rewards/Recognition Process Improvement
Institutional: Individuals' negotiation of roles, resources and responsibilities within given system	Climate for organizational justice Climate for continual learning Climate for teamwork Climate for customer service	Communication Compensation Performance Management Rewards/Recognition Training Planning Budget

When beginning to think about employing systems to affect change, it is important to keep a number of organization development principles in mind. These principles involve creating a vision for change with short and long-term goals. It is important to diagnose situations to understand them. Data collection is also a critical step. Identifying who needs to be involved in a process and making the activity or process relevant to staff are important. Communication about what is happening and why will ensure that staff are motivated to be involved and will feel a valued part of the process.

Because any change process needs to be incremental and continuous to be lasting, there needs to be a commitment to be engaged for the long haul. At the University of Maryland Libraries we have been making progress towards a healthy organization by employing a systems approach using OD tools and techniques. We are committed to

continuous learning. We hope this might be an approach that will support your goals of becoming a healthy organization.

Conclusion

Ben Schneider hypothesized that people are attracted to an organization based on their perceived fit between their personal beliefs, competencies and values with an organization's characteristics -- in other words, organizational climate. He identified a serious negative consequence of the ASA model: organizations can tend to extreme levels of employee homogenization, leading to organizational demise. Homogenization of employee beliefs, attitudes, values and assumptions results in reduced sensitivity to environmental demands such as shifts in customer needs and desires. When that happens, the organization may miss threats in its environment and, once it is finally forced to recognize its environmental threat, it may not have the behavioral or cognitive flexibility to respond adequately.

Thus, the ASA model strongly suggests that diversity needs to be a central imperative for organizations, which must find ways by which healthy levels of workforce diversity are maintained. Organizational responsiveness to an environment requires not only anticipating environmental changes but managing the challenges brought on by a diverse workforce. Organizations have to address issues of workforce diversity, teamwork and group conflict seriously. When they do, they can become healthy organizations.^{ix}

ⁱ Paul J. Hanges, Lisa M. Leslie and Kristen Keller, *The University of Maryland Libraries' Organizational Climate and Culture Survey: Final Report* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2005), 5-6.

ⁱⁱ Lisa H. Nishii, Jana L. Raver and Alexandria L. Dominguez, *Results of the University of Maryland Libraries' Organizational Culture and Diversity Assessment: Final Report* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2000).

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles B. Lowry and Paul J. Hanges, "What is the Healthy Organization? Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment: A Research Partnership," *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 8, no. 1 (2008): 2-3.

^{iv} Paul J. Hanges, Juliet Aiken and Xiafang Chen, "Climate for Diversity and Customer Service: The Healthy Organization." Paper presented at the 2008 American Psychological Association Conference, Boston, MA.

^v Paul J. Hanges, Juliet Aiken, and Xiafang Chen, "Diversity, Organizational Climate and Organizational Culture: The Role They Play in Influencing Organizational Effectiveness" *Proceedings of the Library Assessment Conference, Association of Research Libraries, Charlottesville, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: ARL), 359-368.

^{vi} Frederick A. Miller and Judith H. Katz. "The Path from Exclusive Club to Inclusive Organization: A Developmental Process," The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc. 2007. www.kjcg.com

^{vii} Great Good Consulting, at <http://www.greatergoodconsulting.com>

^{viii} Peter Senge et al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

^{ix} Hanges, Aiken and Chen. *Op. cit.*