Skin Deep

Company diversity hiring practices lack depth.

By Aparna Nancherla

Your company's website might boast, among other things, the variety of its employees, and the atmosphere of community that pervades. But public relations angles aside, just how committed to achieving a diverse workforce is your organization?

Many companies' current efforts are deceptive in their effectiveness. The underlying problem with many diversity hiring practices is that they are superficial at best.

Novations Group, a Boston-based global consulting group, surveyed 2,556 senior human resource and training and development executives to look at diversity hiring programs, with some telling results. The top diversity hiring initiative, at 57 percent, was that companies review their hiring practices to ensure that they are inclusive.

"But these companies are just looking at their practices once. They're not looking at whether these minority candidates are being hired and retained," says Fred Smith, president of Novations Group.

In addition, 34 percent of companies set goals for diversity hiring, and 36 percent use an internal referral program that focuses on hiring diverse candidates. Though again, many of these organizations fall short when it comes to following through with their programs.

"Management has to do what's needed so that the new hire becomes a contributor as fast as possible. This may mean coaching or giving the person developmental assignments," notes Smith.

Other common hiring practices listed included giving training to hiring managers at 43 percent; developing relationships with minority professional associations at 41 percent; networking among minority communities at 37 percent; and posting jobs on minority websites and publications at 39 percent.

"Often we find that an organization's hiring tools are purely tactical," says Smith. "Using diversity recruiters or minority websites for hiring is certainly helpful, but we think it's critical for all these initiatives to be scrutinized in a systematic way, and to see how they all fit together."

Another complicating factor is that many of these practices are somewhat narrow in their definition of diversity. There is a consistent focus on women and people of color as candidate targets, while other qualified applicants may be overlooked.

Those organizations that are more active in terms of getting the brightest and the best human capital onboard and fully engaged perform better from a financial standpoint. "Look beyond compliance. You're at a competitive disadvantage when you're not trying to find the best candidates," comments Smith.

Finally, diversity hiring has an effect on the business side and the bottom line, as much as on the legal and human resource sides.

"Depending on the industry, there is an expectation from the clients and the corporations that the workforce is more reflective of the population, not just in the entry-level position but all the way up to the highest levels of the organization. There are companies that will not do business with companies that are not reflective of the general population," adds Smith.

The Internet survey was conducted by Equation Research on behalf of Novations Group.

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The BIG Number

34%

of companies set goals for diversity hiring.

>> **What does your organization do to hire from the broadest possible pool?**

Review inclusivity of hiring practices	**57%**
Train hiring managers	**43%**
Partner with minority professional associations	**41%**
Network with minority communities	**37%**
Post jobs on minority websites and publications	**39%**
Use internal referral to find diverse candidates	**36%**
Recruit on campuses with large minority populations	**35%**
Set goals for diversity hiring	**34%**
Use diversity recruiters	**27%**
Nothing	**14%**

Source: Novations Group