



Creating the Leaders of the Future: Integrating Diversity and Leadership Development

By Alice Miller and Jon Derek Croteau

Despite concerted efforts to increase diversity in the leadership ranks in higher education, such diversity is still lacking. The representation of women, people of color and LGBTQ individuals in top administrative and academic roles typically does not reflect the demographics of the students and communities these institutions serve. This is of great concern if colleges and universities are going to exemplify their missions of providing rich, multidimensional, multicultural, equitable educational experiences.

Why are diversity efforts falling short? One reason is that many initiatives designed to cultivate leadership diversity are often too narrowly conceived. Such initiatives may, for instance, promote a diverse, inclusive environment but not go the extra mile to help individuals — let's call them “diverse high-potentials” — obtain the tools they need to build leadership capabilities and portfolios over time. In such instances, leadership diversity initiatives consist of well-intentioned policies but little more.

We believe that leadership diversity must derive from deliberate, sustained leadership development for these high-potentials, an idea that higher education institutions are beginning to embrace. In our experience, recruiting diverse leaders from the outside is an uncertain and expensive proposition given the small pool of qualified candidates and the fierce competition for executives who

are considered “diverse.” Thus, creative and comprehensive internal professional development initiatives are critical.

A Connective Context

Leadership development is no easy task even when diversity is not factored in — it is a challenge and concern across all industries. Identifying and preparing the next generation of great leaders is a current obsession in the corporate world, for example, as the “war for talent” rages. In *The Leadership Pipeline*, authors Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel outline the roots of the problem as follows:

“Many companies are failing to develop leadership bench strength and day-to-day leadership effectiveness. Leading-edge development programs, no matter how well-designed, aren't sufficient to achieve these goals. What's lacking is a connective context. In other words, the connection between leadership development training programs, succession planning, performance management and rewards is tenuously defined at best. In most companies, human resources orchestrates these activities, and the various groups responsible for them compete for resources, management attention and power. Human resources efforts are rarely integrated.”

This scenario likely resonates with higher education HR professionals, especially in regards to resource challenges and the difficulty of integrating various critical efforts when overarching support from the president and other

senior administrators is lacking. To secure management attention and improve the success of leadership development efforts, Charan, Drotter and Noel espouse the “pipeline” methodology, which strives to identify and create strong leaders throughout organizations via a formal, integrated, sustained approach. A critical assertion the authors make is that the success of executives is based upon years of accumulated skills and expertise. Leaders are not born, nor are they made overnight. Good leaders are years in the making and have had a wealth of experiences at multiple levels of one or more organizations in order to prepare them for top posts.

It is not enough, for example, to recruit and hire faculty and low-level administrators and assume that, over time, they will ripen and become ready for greater responsibilities. To build effective leadership at all levels, organizations need to:

- Identify high-potential leadership candidates early;
- Provide them with growth assignments;
- Give useful feedback;
- Coach and mentor them; and
- Offer or facilitate leadership development courses and curricula.

Doing so requires dedicated time and resources, and yet the point of a pipeline-oriented leadership development approach is that it encourages a “grow” vs. “buy” mentality, which pays dividends in the long run.

Let’s take a look at how this approach

might work for someone in a first-time managerial position within higher education — a department chair, say. As a novice supervisor, this individual is not just taking on more responsibility; she or he needs to approach work differently. This includes reallocating time to complete her or his own work and oversee the work of others; valuing managerial work and viewing it as mission-critical; and ensuring that others are fulfilled and better at what they do.

There is something to be said for baptism by fire, but first-time managers — especially those that have traveled an academic track most of their careers — need organizational support to grow and develop as leaders, perhaps with the potential to one day assume senior positions.

Diversity and Bench Strength

The professional development approach aims to build bench strength throughout organizations, and many of the same activities it encourages — growth assignments, feedback, coaching and mentoring — can be applied to building a diverse bench. These activities also provide a fundamental element — motivation — for the success of leadership diversity efforts. Diverse leadership candidates themselves bear responsibility to explore and pursue career development opportunities at their disposal. Leadership diversity efforts require a coordinated commitment from both institutions and leadership candidates (and the groups who represent them). That is to say, these initiatives must be top-down and bottom-up.

But they should also have a lateral component — that is, initiatives must be integrated across departments, schools and even campuses. This alludes to the “connective context” of which Charan, Drotter and Noel write. Leadership candidates must see a tangible link between their efforts to develop themselves and similar efforts taking place all across campus. They must witness others’ successes and be able to envision a long-term career payoff for themselves.

Many leadership diversity efforts in higher education today stop short of establishing this context. They may, for example, go out of their way to recognize and support affiliate groups on campus and to reach out to diverse

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high-potentials, but fail to take the extra step of pursuing sustained, strategic leadership development.

Going the Extra Mile

Let’s use the example of an openly gay female faculty member who is named chair of the English department. The woman may see the occasion as an opportunity to launch her own career in administration, and to further LGBTQ and/or women’s issues and visibility en route. She may have grand ambitions. For its part, however, the institution may be content knowing that a “diverse” chair heads up a prominent department, taking it as a sign that its inclusivity and diversity efforts are working. But that’s really just the start. Now the important work

begins of supporting the development of the leader — facilitating the mindset shift described earlier in valuing and embracing managerial work. It's a particularly challenging shift to make for a faculty member accustomed to near absolute autonomy in her work. And yet it may be a transformation she is eager to undergo after years in the classroom.

So while the institution may have identified a diverse high-potential in its ranks, it needs to go the extra mile to help the chair move up the administrative ladder. Examples of what an institution might provide in this instance include:

Growth assignments — participating in or chairing campus-wide committees; spearheading policy or program development; representing the institution at important functions or in media opportunities; engaging in community outreach or fundraising on the school's behalf.

Feedback — focused performance reviews; one-on-one interviews with HR or other institutional representatives; regular, formal mentoring sessions; engagement with career coaches and advisors; leadership assessments that identify strengths and potential career derailers.

Training and coaching — one-on-one coaching from professional consultants; funding for general leadership development programs (e.g., Center for Creative Leadership, ACE Leadership Academy for Department Chairs) and diversity-oriented leadership programs and organizations (e.g., Stanford's Executive Program for Women Leaders).

It is important to reiterate that, to be truly effective in developing leadership capabilities, the above activities must be sustained, coordinated and cumulative.

Promising Practices

There are colleges and universities adopting progressive, integrated programs to ensure that leaders such as the hypothetical English chair described above get the development support they need. Institutions are building programs that combine sophisticated diversity initiatives

with leadership development — striving to incorporate other “connective” elements such as succession planning, performance management and rewards. They are then tying these efforts to their institutions' high-level strategic planning.

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At last fall's CUPA-HR annual conference in Las Vegas, the association's diversity, equity and inclusion committee hosted a workshop highlighting promising practices that institutions are undertaking to improve the sophistication and

effectiveness of diversity-related HR practices. The session emphasized that diversity efforts follow an “evolutionary path,” beginning at informational stages and progressing ultimately to a state of institutionalization and strategic integration. Leadership building is one core element.

One of the workshop presenters was Cheryl Cofield, director of culture, diversity and inclusion at Georgia Institute of Technology. Cofield walked the audience through her institution's myriad diversity and inclusion programs, taking care to illustrate how various components, including those aimed at leadership development, are linked to broader people strategies, HR goals and institutional goals. The effort to marry leadership development to culture and inclusion is a critical work in progress, notes Cofield.

For example, the institute is just launching a new program focused on developing high-potential women leaders, but has experienced many tangible successes to date, including the recent formation of six diversity-related employee resource groups (ERGs) which have helped to identify more than 70 leadership development opportunities for participants. (To read more about Georgia Tech's employee resource groups, see the article “A Roadmap for ERGs (With HR at the Wheel)” from the Fall 2013 issue of *The Higher Education Workplace* magazine – www.cupahr.org/ERG.)

Georgia Tech's efforts focus on fostering transformation across the institution and enhancing the self-awareness,

Higher Education Leadership Development Programs

ACE Leadership Academy for Department Chairs

www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/Leadership-Academy-for-Dept-Chairs.aspx

ACE Fellows Program

www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/ACE-Fellows-Program.aspx

ACE Institute for New Chief Academic Officers

www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/ACE-Institute-for-New-Chief-Academic-Officers.aspx

Advancement Leadership Academy

<http://advancementleaders.org>

Center for Creative Leadership

www.ccl.org/leadership/index.aspx

Council of Independent Colleges Senior Leadership Academy

www.cic.edu/meetings-and-events/Leadership-Development/Pages/Senior-Leadership-Academy.aspx

Harvard Graduate School of Education Management Development Program

www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/programs/higher-education/portfolio/management-development.html

HERS Institutes

<http://hersnet.org/institutes/what-are-the-institutes>

Indiana Center for Philanthropy: Women's Philanthropy Institute

www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/womens-philanthropy-institute

Rutgers University Center for Organizational Development and Leadership

www.odl.rutgers.edu

Stanford University Executive Program for Women Leaders

www.gsb.stanford.edu/exed/epwl

Stanford University Executive Program for Nonprofit Leaders

www.gsb.stanford.edu/gipr/epnl

cultural competence and “cultural dexterity” of top leaders. “With power comes awesome responsibility, and we’re helping leaders understand the tremendous impact they have on campus climate,” Cofield says.

Among the others on the event’s agenda, Lori Gentles, vice president for human resources, diversity and inclusion at California State University, Fullerton presented on the new division of diversity and inclusion within the university’s HR organization. (See the Inclusion Cultivates Excellence column on p. 9 to read more about this new venture.) And reinforcing the idea that higher education can learn from corporate diversity programs, John Basile, vice president of diversity and inclusion for Fidelity Investments, spoke about how the HR department at his firm has gotten buy-in from senior management for diversity and leadership development programs.

HR As Catalyst

The challenge for HR executives in higher education is to take progressive ideas regarding the development of diverse leadership and build unequivocal institutional support around them — to get academic and administrative leadership to, verbally and financially, champion leadership development. What follows are some critical steps HR can take:

Implore the president to establish leadership diversity as a priority and to set tangible goals towards achieving it. This will depend on what type of president is in office, but HR leaders can build their case on the premise that leadership diversity is critical to the institution’s mission and is achievable through creative, comprehensive programs.

Make leadership diversity a budget and resource priority. Serious and successful initiatives need money and people over an extended period of time.

Track diverse leaders as they develop and grow over time. Measures must be in place to intermittently reconnect with diverse high-potentials and ensure that they are progressing and have the career support they need.


Build continuous improvement into leadership diversity efforts. Ensure the institution is monitoring what’s working and what’s not, so that it can revise and improve upon past efforts.

If your institution has one, get the chief diversity officer involved. Surprisingly, CDOs are often not made an integral part of leadership development initiatives, which is certainly a missed opportunity.

Final Thoughts

When executive candidates interview for open positions at colleges and universities, they are often asked the “diversity question,” which is typically a two-parter: “What is diversity and what does it mean to you?” It is not an easy question. How many of us can answer it eloquently, beyond what’s stated in our institution’s diversity statement? Yet it is a central question to the success of diversity initiatives — and specifically to those aimed at improving diversity among senior leadership. Unless human resources and institutional leaders take the question seriously and really explore its nuances, efforts to develop leadership diversity will continue to lag behind hopes and expectations.

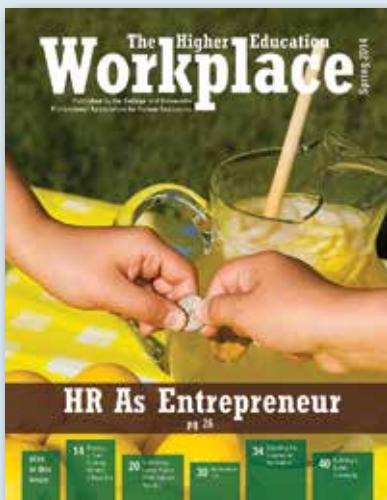
We are collectively getting better at the first part — “What is diversity?” There is more of an appreciation today that diversity isn’t just about acknowledging and celebrating differences but about making sure any legitimate differentiating characteristic — age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, physical disability, speech or accent, and on and on — does not become a prohibiting factor in one’s ability to succeed. The acceptance of inclusion as a fundamental component of diversity has been an important, liberating step forward.

The second part of the diversity question — “What does it mean to you?” — is the key to improving leadership diversity programs. HR professionals can address this question through a commitment to more sophisticated and sustained initiatives to groom diverse leaders for future success. Higher ed seems at the cusp of recognizing not just the importance but also the value of diverse leadership, and many institutions are establishing models for building leadership teams that will one day — hopefully soon — reflect the constituencies they represent. 

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