Psychology of Strategic Planning In the Staffing and Diversity at an Undergraduate College in the USA: A Model for Future Human Resources Management Planning In Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This paper is about strategic planning in a four-year college with a focus on strategy in the areas of staffing and diversity.   Strategic plan is essentially the direction, scope, and range of an organization (Thompson, 2010) such as a college or university over the long term that attains advantage for the organization through its coordination of resources and activities within a competitive environment to meet the needs of market and to satisfy stakeholder expectations.

Keywords: Human Resources, staffing, Diversity, Faculty, Training, University, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

In order to build and strengthen the core competencies and capabilities of an establishment, the right people, that is, persons with talent and cultural competence, become very important in a post-secondary institution. A school, which will only be identified as BBB College, has a competitive advantage in a multi-ethnic environment like South Florida.   The positive effects of its strategic human resource management (HRM) practices remain encouraging.   This paper attempted to use this public institution's strategic planning in HRM as a model in Nigeria where there are continued challenges in the areas of strategic human resource management.

2. College Background

BBB College is a public institution with generally a four-year learning environment.   The BBB College comes with the competitive advantage of being located in a multi-ethnic environment like South Florida.

A strategic plan is essentially the direction, scope, and range of an organization (Thompson, 2010) such as a college or university.   This is essential over the long-term as attaining advantages for any organization comes through its coordination of resources and activities within a competitive environment to meet the needs of the market and to satisfy stakeholder expectations (Mello, 2011).

BBB College is a public institution that recently transitioned into a four-year learning environment.   It has an enrollment of more than 60,000 students across four campuses.   The student population and faculty are beginning to slowly show the image of a diverse urban area after a sordid history, especially in the area of racial challenges.

3. A Note on the College's Vision

BBB College will be a destination for academic excellence, serving students from local communities and beyond.   The College will embrace diversity in its student, faculty, staff, and business partnerships and foster a welcoming, affirming, and empowering culture of respect and inclusion.   The College will stand at

the leading edge of technological and environmentally sound innovation, providing attainable, high-quality educational programs. BBB College will be recognized for its recruitment and retention of diverse, outstanding faculty and staff whose primary focus will be to promote the success of each individual student while supporting lifelong learning for all students.   As a model post-secondary institution, the College will connect its students to diverse local and global communities through technical, professional, and academic careers.

3.1 Its Mission Statement

The mission of BBB College is to achieve student success by developing informed and creative students capable of contributing to a knowledge and service-based global society. The College is committed to fostering a learning-centered community that celebrates diversity and inclusion by empowering and engaging students, faculty, and staff.

3.2 Core Values

Academic Excellence and Student Success: Achieving student success through high-quality, learning-centered programs and services while continuously evaluating and improving student learning outcomes that reflect the highest academic standards.   This is accomplished by providing flexible educational opportunities that are accessible to all students, regardless of time or place.

Diversity and Inclusion: Creating a community that celebrates diversity and cultural awareness while promoting the inclusion of all its members.

Innovation: Developing and implementing the most emergent technologies and teaching/learning methods and strategies to create learning environments that are flexible and responsive to local, national, and international needs.

Integrity: Fostering an environment of respect, dignity, and compassion that affirms and empowers all its members while striving for the highest ethical standards and social responsibility.

Sustainability: Ensuring effective, efficient use of college resources while implementing fiscally sound practices and environmentally sustainable initiatives that can be modeled in collaboration with our community.

Lifelong Learning: Promoting the educational growth and development of all individuals through a variety of postsecondary professional, technical, and academic programs and services.

4. The College's Current Staffing Strategy

A detailed review of the school's strategic plan and the responses received from interviewing one of the HR managers showed that the school has now instituted "new policies and procedures that   facilitate strategy execution" (Thompson, 2010, p.358).   The 2009-2011 HR strategic plan for organizational effectiveness provides an exceptional opportunity for the College's leadership and HR Department to align human resource programs and services with the college's strategic plan and the development master plan for faculty and staff

5. Background to Organizational Analysis

This is a background on how the College's strategy in the area of diversity and staffing aligns with the College's Vision and Mission statements and core values. A recognition of the need to develop a more supportive and focused strategy to the management of faculty, staff, and student workers and within the College's core values becomes obvious as the College becomes more committed to promoting a culture of diversity and cultural competence as well as to faculty/staff development.

This strategic focus remains highly potent given the school's old southern mentality as it relates to lack of inclusiveness of diverse faculty/staff and students. For a long time a state of under-utilization of

non-white and other minorities existed as the College once had openings for fewer Blacks than are available in the academic market place.   There is a college-wide strategy through its human resources department that focuses on building and incorporating faculty and staff of diversity and cultural competence into its workforce.   Central to the institutional strategy of the College is its goal to view diverse staff and faculty as appealing to a workplace like a higher learning institution.   Mello (2011) states that "human resources…are dealing with an increasingly diverse workforce and being increasingly called upon to be socially responsible in their operations and employment practices…demographic changes in society are creating a number of challenges for management of HR" (p.40).   The College needs to maximize on a diverse and competent workforce that results from an organizational motivation to show "commitment to understanding and appreciating diversity [and not just to] implement diversity initiatives [but] to ensure compliance with federal, state, and local employment laws" (Mello, 2011, p.40).

The College's strategy sets out to achieve its staffing and diversity goals by making sure its plan includes specific measurements, assessment processes, and timelines for evaluation purposes.   A central rationale for the staffing/diversity strategy relating to faculty and staff development as the College is the need to set a focused direction for where it wants to go with regard to providing guidance to new staff, the type of staff that is important to the College, and establishing orientation events and training (campus and college wide) programs.   The staffing strategy adequately provides a framework in the areas of employee development, filling openings, diversity goals, staff balance, and retention.

As part of its strategic resources the college has a plan of cross-training that reflects the needs and available time of each unit and ensures that coverage of functions can be handled in the event of absence.   In conjunction with the Department of Instructional Technology, the College is strategically able to implement a state of the art applicant tracking system and create an interactive online orientation for new staff.   The use of automated forms in the HR department allows for the adequate implementation of systems that help streamline all hiring and appointments.   In line with the continuously changing marketplace and high-level competition the College is responding by not only updating staff training but incorporating new award opportunities, reward events, and appreciation programs for achieving staff.   Increasingly, multiple recruitment sources (Yaeger & Sorenson, 2006) are used as part of its staffing strategy in the search for and obtaining a wide pool of qualified applicants for academic and administrative jobs.   Computerized resume services, advertisement in ethnic-based and mainstream news outlets, and the use of an open house remain highly appealing as it is done in partnership with various companies and government agencies.   As part of its staffing strategy there is a program of wellness and health development for staff that is critical as it allows employees to remain health conscious, remain motivated and productive, and have some degree of socialization and fun at work.

As part of the College's strategy and practices there is a comprehensive business intelligence unit that helps maintain a human resource (e.g., staffing matters) measurement that enables an effective system of managing staff information, particularly in the areas of recruitment and retention.   Its metrics cover key categories like past or historical, current or real time, and future or forward looking measures to track its overall functioning.   Specific resources are constantly being located in different areas (e.g., retention, training, and development) and as such the availability of business intelligence in regard to assessing data and graphical and textual reports becomes helpful.   The school has benefited from this technological and research resource as it helps keep a score card on overall management of the college in the areas of employee satisfaction and training program effectiveness and utilization.   The overall goal of the College's strategy as it relates to staff performance is to focus on continuous improvement with available metrics to measure challenges and successes (Davanna, Fembrum, & Tichy, 1981; Ichniowski & Shaw, 2008; and Heneman & Judge, 2008).

6. A Detailed SWOT Analysis in Staffing/Diversity Strategy

In order to highlight and identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, (SWOT) analysis showed a steady progress in the college's objective to become more diverse in its staffing, including faculty, administrators, and staff.

Strengths: Action plans have been developed to focus on some internal factors like the improvement of the internal decision-making process on matters of staffing by bringing staffing and diversity experts to address faculty and staff on the benefits of having a diverse workplace with the right people.   Some positive movement has been seen on the part of some of longtime, non-minority workers (having been at the College for over 30-40 years surrounded by very little air of diversity).   Another internal strength seen is the positive response by faculty and staff to the encouragement for them to participate in various professional development opportunities and training on an on-going basis.

Weaknesses: Some of the internal weaknesses are lack of instituted plans to combat faculty resistance to doctorate level education.   For example, the College recently transformed some of its program to a four-year degree level and yet there is nothing in the HR strategic plan addressing organizational concerns on this issue.   While a majority of the faculty members, including the part-time and adjunct personnel that make up the majority of faculty, are showing an adequate performance level, their quality would be enhanced and distinctive with a doctorate degree, particularly in a knowledge-based competitive workplace. As education is being reshaped, both in content and standards, students pursuing a four-year college education could benefit from a body of faculty with doctoral training and certification.   Another area of internal weakness in the HR strategy is the staffing strategy that offers more full-time jobs through internal recruitment.

Opportunities: Some of the opportunities presented through external influences are the recognition that the College could get from accreditation bodies if there were a push for more faculty to obtain doctoral degrees with the College now turning onto a four-year collegiate environment.

Threats: One of the noticeable threats from external factors that could likely have highest influence on the College is the high competition among surrounding colleges and universities (at least three existing ones and one new one) as they could draw more students to these schools with much higher level of advanced-degree faculty and staff.   Competition is also very high for dollars from the state legislature

7. The BBB College Model and HRM Challenges in Nigeria

The Nigerian HRM Challenge has been observed within Nigerian public institutions by   Ayanda and Sani (2010) in their work "Strategic Human Resource Management and Organizational Effectiveness in the Public Sector: Some Evidence."   Ayanda and Sani (2010) write that public sectors and institutions like some Nigerian universities are in need of enhancement in the strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices.   While some private corporation and organizations have shown progress in the practice of strategic human resource management (e.g., Katou & Budhwar, 2006), (Dimba & K'Óbonyo, 2009) public sectors like Nigerian universities still face challenges in the development and practice of strategic human resource management in areas such as staffing, career planning, diversity, employee satisfaction and professional development.   There is lack of holistic integration between HRM function and various operations within a given sector or institution.   There is poor attention in the professional development and training of non-personnel officers in HRM which will assist them with goals and objectives of the institution's HRM.   The public sectors, including higher institutions, are faced with undue influence of tribalism, nepotism, politics, and other local challenges that negatively affect organizational effectiveness in the areas of staffing, productivity, competition, and best practices.   There is lack of appropriate metrics in measuring HRM practices on organizational performance/output.

The BBB college model needs to serve as a model for public institutions like universities with special attention on the development of diverse internal factors like in staff improvement and professional development.   Nigerian HRM will gain from developing strategic planning to help monitor the development of desired employee attitudes and behaviors using modern appraisal mechanisms.   This appraisal-based information could be used for changing the selection and training practices to select and develop employees with the desired behaviors and attitudes.   However, the effectiveness of skilled employees will be limited unless they are motivated to perform their jobs.   The Nigerian public sectors like universities should develop a strategy relating to staffing and diversity by using state-of-the-art technology to provide ongoing professional training and development for staff.   Modern technology could

also help to strengthen skills and competency in staff and faculty through face-to-face, on-line, and long-distance training and communication. In order to ensure support for ongoing staff training and development there is a need for the trained HRM staff and managers to visit each of the main departments in a university in order to make sure the technology infrastructure and assigned campus training staff are fully functioning.

The recruitment process, hiring, and retention of ethnically competent employees (Elmuti et al., 1993, Makower, 1995, Wilson, 1995) could be achieved through cultural and tribal sensitivity, training, a comprehensive orientation program, and cross-training programs, and by instituting a recognition award program for achievement. The university management could enhance a HRM environment by practicing a flexible but authoritative administrative style as this could allow HR to vigorously work towards its various staffing and diversity objectives. To adequately assess progress in achieving specific goals relating to allocation of resources in the area of recruitment and diversity, as well as alignment with the mission of a university (e.g., competency and inclusiveness), maintenance of historical data and comparative analysis could occur through the creation of business intelligence office.

8. Conclusion

For the future, one focus is to engage in forward looking studies through staff attitude surveys, absenteeism, retention, and development metrics and measures. These indicators could allow Nigerian universities to identify areas that need improvement. The Nigerian universities should work on leadership development of talented and competent individuals of various tribal or ethnic backgrounds with a focus on producing a higher rate of doctoral level faculty and staff. There is a likelihood that with well-defined training in comprehensive staffing/diversity strategy under the air of team spirit on the part of faculty staff and management, student satisfaction will increase with regard to the level of productivity and services coming from most of the faculty and staff. The HRM of any Nigerian university should remain on the path of growth opportunities related to executing best practices in the staffing, diversity strategies, and operations. A better evaluation process will continue to help higher institutions in continuously improving all of its objectives, especially relating to making sure the faculties and departments have the right assets (e.g., highly culturally competent, diverse, and skilled employees) in position at the right time and in the right place to provide the best practices in teaching our students in a cost effective way and in a manner that is competitively advantaged to all stakeholders.

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