Next Steps: Charting your Eight-Competency Journey

Developing Your Own Integrated Learning Strategy

Becoming proficient in each of the eight competencies may seem to be a daunting challenge, but it is much more enjoyable and less difficult than it first appears. The learning process is rewarding in itself and can enliven your workdays and energize your spirit. Moreover, it is a challenge well worth taking. Mastering the eight competencies will enable you to become a much more effective D&I professional and provide you with more opportunities and superior rewards. Your enhanced skills and expertise have the potential to make your professional life more engaging, exciting, and rewarding.

We have written this final chapter to provide a springboard on which to launch your acquisition of the eight competencies you need and to cultivate the ones you already have. We hope you will find this section to be a useful conclusion that integrates the disparate elements of the previous chapters and serves as the beginning of a career-long process of exploration and discovery.

Eight Competencies and Seven Functions

We also hope that you have found that we made good on the assertions made in the introduction about the usefulness of the competencies to our profession. Of particular concern is their role in meeting the growing expectations corporate executive have of us. As you will recall, we believe that our senior leaders will look to us to employ seven functions to help them achieve their strategic goals. Now that we are familiar with all of the competencies, we can begin to appreciate how useful they will be in meeting our multiplying responsibilities. Table 1 summarizes the linkages between each of the eight competencies and each of the seven function it serves.
Table 1: Competencies Most Useful to Tackling the Seven Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Systemic Thinking</th>
<th>Strategic Savvy</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Global Mindset</th>
<th>Crosscultural Competence</th>
<th>Business &amp; Financial Acumen</th>
<th>Holistic HR Know How</th>
<th>Tech &amp; Social Media</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advance the global needs of our business &amp; our constituencies</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Support the recruitment of employees who have the skills, savvy, &amp; competencies to complete tasks of rising complexity</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>❌</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drive commerce by providing consumer insights, enhancing market penetration, and creating new marketing initiatives</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Employ state-of-the-art metric systems to measure, delineate, &amp; quantify our contributions to the company &amp; prove our relevance</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultivate a deeper, broader understanding of the shifting nature of diversity &amp; inclusion</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create innovative programs, policies, &amp; concepts to accommodate the demands facing diversity professionals</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Align our efforts to the strategic &amp; tactical priorities of our corporations and organizations</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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Of course, the placement of the checkmarks is somewhat arbitrary. Depending on the circumstances, each competency could support our efforts in meeting all of the seven tasks; moreover, the three competencies in the leadership impact category are relevant to most any management task we pursue. Nonetheless, the table underscores the usefulness of the competencies in meeting new business needs and providing value to our companies.

A Springboard

You may agree that the challenge we have placed before you is critically important to our profession and to you personally. You might also accept that success in meeting it will bring you and your company significant rewards. Nonetheless, you could still be troubled by the size and scope of this undertaking and uncertain about how to begin. We believe the first step is developing the right attitude—realizing that mastery of the eight competencies is not an onerous burden, but an invitation to a career-long journey of discovery and affirmation.

Going forward, use this book as a travel guide for this journey; employ it as you would a pamphlet you would stick in your knapsack before hiking in Yellowstone Park, or a GPS app you might have on your phone while finding your way from the Empire State Building to Carnegie Hall. You could also view it as a personal exercise program for D&I professionals: a series of workouts designed to sharpen your mind, widen your perspective, and energize your love of learning.

One advantage of the guidebook approach is that it encourages you to plot your own course. A traveler to Barcelona, Mexico City or Wellington, New Zealand, Bogotá, Mumbai, or Wales does not work his or her way from the first page of a travel guide to the last. Experienced travelers design their own itineraries, carefully planning the stops on their tours according to their circumstances, needs, and wishes. Our hope is that you actively chart your own journey and review your plan periodically to assess your progress and make adjustments.

Exercise your systemic planning competency skills to develop an integrated learning strategy that expedites your exploration of the eight competencies. This plan should be an evolving document that begins with an overall strategy that you periodically revise and expand. Supplement the basic plan with modules that focus on individual professional responsibilities or opportunities as they arise. When you take on a new project, for example, you could write a plan module that outlines your strategy for leveraging your role on the project to enhance your mastery of each of the eight competencies. This planning process helps ensure that you approach the eight-competency challenge deliberately and systematically.

A Sample Module Plan

Let us flesh out this concept of an integrated learning strategy by envisioning a plan module. Our scenario stars Victoria, an early-career D&I professional in a major, global corporation who has been given a golden opportunity to practice and enhance her eight competencies. The diversity organization has asked Victoria to
help launch a new employee research group; she has been put in charge of Phase I, the planning phase, of the ERG project, which includes developing the mission statement, goals and objectives, the organizational structure, the messaging for selling the ERG to senior leaders and employees, and the communications plan for launching the ERG. The implementation of this planning effort will occur in Phase II. Our young D&I professionals has been told that the decision regarding her leadership of Phase II will depend on her performance in Phase 1.

As soon as Victoria learns about the assignment, she begins creating a personal strategy that links each step of her project to the steps she will take to leverage the project to develop her skills, enhance her profile in the corporation, and make her the best candidate to lead Phase II. Victoria has prepared a draft (see Table 1) with care, but she recognizes this is the first of many iterations. Victoria will constantly revise and update the plan as she identifies new issues and opportunities, faces unanticipated problems, and introduces new elements and approaches that reflect her growth as a diversity leader.

### Table 2: Self-Learning Plan for Communications Plan

**Phase One Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Issues, Resources, Considerations</th>
<th>Tactics for Advancing 8 Competencies Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Creation of Planning Team</td>
<td>Focus on forming a “team of rivals,” smart, knowledgeable, strategic and systemic thinkers from whom I can learn. Find superstars who will force me to be at the top of my game at all times. Co-chair the team with lead public relations and HR representatives and the leader of the group the ERG will represent. The team should report to the CDO and the ERG’s executive sponsor. Include representatives of business strategy, HR, finance, marketing, operations, public affairs, and IT. Ensure participation of global operations.</td>
<td>I will create a team that will support my efforts to enhance my grasp of each of the eight competencies. Systemic thinking and strategic savvy: I will work with team members to learn about connections and interrelationships across the enterprise, while learning to identify entrenched problems and practical solutions. Influence: I will use this opportunity to enhance my soft power skills, demonstrate my persuasion abilities, and advance my professional credibility. I will leverage my relationships with team members to learn about global and intercultural issues and strive to demonstrate my global mindset and intercultural competence. I will strive to earn the respect of the team and ensure active participation of the HR, IT, and financial representatives to gain knowledge and demonstrate know-how. I will take this opportunity to work with team members to build relationships with key influencers and identify and fill gaps in my expertise (e.g., HR, technology, and social media tools).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Identify: - Key influencers (individuals or groups with power to advance or impede our success) -Target Audience (internal and external stakeholders who we need to reach and influence) Identify and evaluate their key concerns, needs, goals, problems, issues, strategies, and missions.</td>
<td>I will leverage this opportunity to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the state of the business, enterprise, and industry. I will continue to familiarize myself with - Appropriate strategic, business, and department plans - Markets and opportunities, customer base, product and service categories, community and external affairs, and the political and regulatory environment -Strategic and competitive needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Goals &amp; Objectives</td>
<td>Use analyses of key influencers, target audiences, and other important inputs to develop a set of goals and objectives.</td>
<td>I will focus on demonstrating and fine-tuning my leadership skills by contributing to the team’s efforts to prioritize key issues, anticipate future threats, and demonstrate personal credibility and integrity.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We hope our hypothetical case helps put the issues we’ve discussed into a real-world context that provides a template you can use to plot your own journey of discovery and to expedite your exploration of the eight competencies. We have shown you an example of a D&I professional early in her career. As we have emphasized throughout this guide, you will revisit the competencies throughout your professional life and adjust them to meet changing demands and responsibilities. By processing the raw material provided in the previous chapters, with the procedures developed in this concluding chapter, we believe you will be able to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

### Motivation and Learning

In developing your strategy, be mindful of the need to incorporate measures that will help you stay on task. Educational experts emphasize that personal learning strategies need tactics designed to motivate self-directed learners, maintain their interest, and build their self-confidence. In creating your plan, you should

- Set goals and learning objectives that are attainable, measurable, and relevant.
- Ensure that your objectives “stretch” your abilities without being too ambitious.
- Establish metrics and feedback mechanisms that measure your progress, sustain, and build your confidence. Establish processes for addressing any performance problems as they arise and fill any skill gaps as they are discovered.1

In other words, you should base your personal program on an honest appraisal of your circumstances, abilities, and proclivities. Many of us overestimate what we can accomplish and underestimate the time required. (Those of us who tend to procrastinate know we are experts in overpromising and under-delivering.) Consequently, we become discouraged and give up. On the other hand, be careful not to sell yourself short. You should still aim high and push at the borders of your abilities. If you do not challenge yourself, your progress will be slow, unrewarding, and ultimately win its support. Focus on finding the sweet spot at the edge of your potential.

Your plan should include a variety of learning tools and approaches to avoid boredom while taking advantage of the best practices of experiential and formal learning. We learn in many different ways and in many different places: the classroom, online, at our desks, at restaurants in conversations over lunch, and in the workplace. Some people are visual learners; others are auditory learners; and still others are kinesthetic learners who learn through physical activity. Determine what kind of learner you are and emphasize that approach.

Regardless of what type of learner you naturally are, we encourage you to consider all forms of learning. In particular, we urge you to consider learning that leverages your personal and professional experiences. In many ways, on-the-job training is a particularly effective approach for acquiring many of the eight competencies, especially if you approach each task at full throttle.
We also recommend that you heed the wisdom of 800 plus-year-old, two-foot, two-inch tall Yoda, the oldest Jedi Master in George Lucas’s Star Wars space saga. Those of us of a certain age relish our memory of Yoda and his words to Luke Skywalker about how to use the Force in Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back. Yoda tells Luke to use his mental powers to lift his spaceship out of the swamp in which it has sunk.

LUKE: Oh, no. We’ll never get it out now.
YODA: stamps his foot in irritation.
YODA: So certain are you. Always with you it cannot be done. Hear you nothing that I say?
LUKE: Master, moving stones around is one thing. This is totally different.
YODA: No! No different! Only different in your mind. You must unlearn what you have learned.
LUKE: (focusing, quietly) All right, I’ll give it a try.
YODA: No! Try not. Do. Or do not. There is no try.2

When Yoda says, “There is no try,” he is not telling Luke that he must not fail. He is advising Luke to put his all into each attempt and be confident that he will succeed. To Yoda, learning and doing are the same thing. There are no practice attempts or half measures. If you wish to succeed, approach every task full bore, sure of your capabilities, and keen on your capacity to acquire new skills and enhance old ones. Your reward will be the powerful feelings of well-being and satisfaction that result from overcoming a tough challenge.

The Role of Reflection

However, even if you put your all into each task, you will not fully develop the eight competencies unless you are continually mindful of your objectives and prepared to turn experiences into knowledge. We learn through “doing,” but we learn more effectively if we take time to reflect on what we are doing and what we have done. We recommend that you sit down at the end of the week (or two or three times a week) to examine your activities in light of the eight competencies.3 You might pose questions similar to the following and answer them either in your mind or in writing:

• How did I use the eight competencies this week to enhance my performance?

• What competencies did I fail to employ that could have made me more effective?
• What did I learn this week about global and cultural issues, business finance, my company and industry, technology, social media, and Web 2.0 strategies? What have I learned that is particularly useful and what should I explore in greater depth?
• What tasks did I approach systematically and strategically? Were there times when my perspective was too narrow or shallow?
• Did I enhance my influence in the company and expand my network this week? Internally? Externally? Could I have done more? What could I have done better?
• How did my colleagues respond to my input and performance? Was I persuasive? Did I influence anyone or enlist allies? How could I have been more compelling?
• What are my plans for the coming week? Month? Six months?

Be sure to enhance your reflections with personal assessment tools that help you identify and inventory key discoveries while also measuring your performance. You should always be alert to learning opportunities that become available and be diligent in seeking out mentors, high-profile, stretch projects and tasks, training opportunities, lectures, formal study, and insightful colleagues. Read widely and critically about issues related to your business, company, management, human behavior, relevant scientific and technology research, communications, and the personal talents and expertise you need to develop.4

The Final Element

Lessons from history can identify the final, crucial element you need for achieving your goal. We begin the search for this insight with John F. Kennedy’s famous remark about Thomas Jefferson when he addressed a roomful of Nobel Prize Winners: “I want to tell you how welcome you are to the White House. I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”5

In these days of intense specialization, we forget about the renowned men and women who mastered numerous disciplines and fields of knowledge from architecture, philosophy and the fine arts to linguistics, cartography, and organic chemistry. We wonder what drove Jefferson to become celebrated architect, inventor, and Founding Father. What fueled Leonardo da Vinci’s efforts to design flying machines, paint masterpieces, and serve as Cesare Borgia’s chief military
engineer? Historians have solved the riddle; it was their unbridled curiosity, their joy in learning, and their passion for innovation. So, if we wish to become the multifaceted D&I professionals the future demands, we must emulate the masters and cultivate our curiosity and our thirst for knowledge.

You can make this happen. Curiosity is an innate trait that we can broaden just as a boxer builds a bicep. The key is in the doing. With each step of your journey of exploration and discovery, you will invigorate, exercise, and strengthen these attributes.

By applying these eight novel methods, processes, and ways of thinking to the practical, day-to-day requirements of your profession, you will intensify your desire to learn even more and steadily raise you Eight Competencies Quotient (E.C.Q.). By deliberating taking on and pursuing the challenges presented in this text, you will make substantial progress. In much less time than you think, you will become an adroit practitioner of these 21st Century D&I capabilities.

Tap into the power of your curiosity, become more effective, productive, and timely, leverage the “pleasure of discovery,” advance relentlessly, and remember:

“Try? Do or do not. There is no try.”

Endnotes