

## TO THE EDITOR

**Eliminating the "Likability Factor"**

The article in the MCC Commentary, May 1991, entitled "Managing Diversity: Turning the Right Thing into a Competitive Advantage" acknowledges that Monsanto has been successful in recruiting qualified minorities and females. Unfortunately, our efforts in retaining these promising young talents do not mirror the recruiting successes. Accordingly, during exit interviews minorities cited difficulties with their supervisors and exclusion from increasing responsibilities as reasons for voluntarily terminating contractual agreements with Monsanto. They also perceived that they were unfairly treated when it came to salaries and promotions.

Although these results are compelling, they are not new. The problem, however, is not specific to managing diverse human resources, but rather it is a problem of managing resources in general. Because, even in the absence of diversity (buzz word for an integrated workplace) equally qualified and capable resources do not encounter the same opportunities for attaining increased responsibilities (promotion).

Everything being equal, the resource that is more likable is selected for increased responsibility. And the "likability factor" has been an important determinant in the selection process, even when qualifications and capabilities are dissimilar. Inferior, less qualified resources with a high likability factor (as determined by the manager) are often given preference.

Straightaway, one can see that resources not possessing "likable" attributes, minorities in particular, will seldom be given opportunities for increased responsibilities even when qualified and capable. Qualified as determined by academic and vocational achievements, and capable as determined by their track record.

The bias in the selection process is due to historical prejudices. And as long as individual performance continues to be measured subjectively, the squandering policies of exclusion will persist. Moreover, managers and supervisors are not held accountable for maximizing the output of their scarce resources as good management and profit maximization dictate. Therefore, when employees perceive that their opportunities for attaining increased responsibilities have been unfairly constrained, talent flight is inevitable. This flight could be physical, where the individual leaves the firm, or mental, where the individual remains with the firm but reduces his productive capability. In either case, the firm loses. In the former, the firm is aware of the cost; in the latter, it suffers an increasing hidden cost. Both costs are induced by mismanagement.

Certainly, if the cost of mismanaging employees is to be reduced or eliminated, a culture of equality of opportunity must be fostered and maintained. Meaning that we must be able to measure how well we do in making sure that all qualified employees have the opportunity to be included in the decision making process. Therefore, we ought to set up standards of qualifications, such as academic and vocational achievements, which are valid indicators of the individual information base. That is, all things being equal, the employees with greater academic or vocational achievements will, as a general rule, perform better than employees with fewer achievements. Furthermore, if knowledge is used as a basis for increased responsibility, selection bias will be reduced and a knowledge-based environment created. As employees are rewarded for knowledge, their performance and that of Monsanto will increase. Moreover, minorities, in a knowledge-based environment, will be able to compete on a level field.

The advent of team-based Continuous Work Improvement may well be the answer to our dilemma — provided that appropriate measurement indices are set up to monitor, and reward, team and individual performance.

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