

The CoopLew National Survey on CDO Attitudes, Workplace Perceptions and Skill Applications:

Prelude to the Next Paradigm Shift for the CDO”

The conclusion of the Obama era intensified the urgency for the pursuit of social, racial, and equity reforms. Citizens from all demographic groups — religious, socio-economic, and more — have rallied and erupted in protest across the country, all with varying demands. These demands are not confined to the U.S. but are an international cry. Among the many cries heard across the world, one message aimed at higher education rang loud and clear: To be competitive in the global market, as President Barack Obama said in 2009, “We need to confer more degrees, especially to underrepresented populations.”

One outstanding impetus of the Obama administration was that institutions of higher education should serve as conduits to meet citizens’ demands. Yet, even with continued protests and mass gatherings across the country, universities have gained little ground in providing salient experiences for underrepresented populations, and according to The Education Trust, the graduation achievement gap continues to widen. (Education Trust, 2015).

Better news: many universities have gained significant ground with creations of chief diversity officer positions. “More CDO positions are being established and are filling seats at the executive table” as stated by Archie Ervin, president of the National Association of Chief Diversity Officers in Higher education.

towards
expertise of
is still very
movement
was likely not

About the need for the research:

“An unprecedented response rate (263) to the CoopLew research proved right away that lived CDO experiences was a topic begging for discovery and discussion.”

However, progress authenticating the diversity leadership debatable. Thus, after Obama’s call on a pace it should

have been in terms of infusing the form, function and framework of the CDO role into higher education. This has also meant that work to be completed by the CDO evolved significantly faster than the development of professional standards for the job. Now, with the Trump administration at the reigns, challenges facing today’s CDO role will represent a paradigm shift toward excellence in “diversity work” that not only addresses people concerns but infiltrates the systems that permeate concerns about globally misaligned administrations as well as unprepared students.

The CoopLew National Survey on CDO Attitudes, Workplace Perceptions and Skill Applications is a research imperative to learn how CDOs see themselves as equipped for a post-Obama era and/or “Trumponomics” on the horizon. Previous works to define and frame CDO work (Williams, Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013) set stages for introductory form and function, but evolutions of diversity as a term, social paradigm, and imperative for excellence have made the role like a palimpsest – written over, scratched out and highlighted for sake of improving visionary and specific competencies and principles. Regardless of what’s been written about the role to date, few studies, if any, focus on the CDO’s perception of diversity work from *lived* experience - which begs to be completed with all candor possible. With this thought in mind, the CoopLew research commands a new look at American universities from those who wear the badge of “chief” regarding diversity, amidst social, relational, political, equity, and educational conundrums. In anticipation of the national release of this next-level research, a few nuggets of the CoopLew findings are provided here as a prelude to discussions about the

critical work completed by CDO's at all types of universities. It is a first "prep-step" for national diversity conversations that are surely on the horizon in the Trump era, but urgently need to begin today.

An unprecedented response rate (263) to the CoopLew research proved right away that lived CDO experiences was a topic begging for discovery and discussion. The survey allowed respondents to reply from either their current CDO seat or the seat of their most recent CDO position. It contained sixteen (16) questions overall, and responses were revealed in ten segments that correlate to CDO relationships, expectations, resources, job satisfaction, skill utilization and perceptions of inclusion. With so much more to come from data still being reviewed, the following extractions are a sneak peek at what's around the corner for CDOs on the stormy road to change in 2017 and beyond.

Expectations of the Current Job

While "top down" administration is the norm for higher education, data show that CDO's believe this is NOT true when it comes to modeling diversity. Nearly 3 of 4 (72%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that accountability for modeling organizational diversity behaviors is expected to begin within the office of the CDO. Another 14% were undecided.

This finding could have profound impact on discussions between university CEOs and CDOs. Clarity of expectations involving what is officially delegated and what should be demonstrated by the CEO begs for distinction if accountability and reciprocity is to flow smoothly from one executive to another. In addition, on campuses where CDOs authentically carry the torch for modeling diversity, the paradigm shift from "centralized resource" to "authorized source" may need to be expressly and publicly consented, especially to peers whose traditional sense of "top down" does not include a CDO. Still, the CEO and his/her entire office will need to model the diversity spoken of in the institution's public mission and aspiration addresses. Detailing expectations to the CDO will not only set precedence for new paradigm shifts, it will establish a truer meaning to "top-down" at the institution.

Satisfaction at the Previous Job

42% of respondents from the previous-role sector of the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed that their reasons for leaving their previous institutions were due to matters of salary. Similar perspectives were aligned regarding campus environment (43%) or family obligations (65%). In addition, each category held unconfirmed (neutral) percentages of 29%, 21% and 21% respectively.

With common qualifiers off the table as majority-confirmed reasons for turnover, concern about the quality of CDO workplace interactions may be on the rise in 2017. Discussion about what CDO's need to feel safe and protected while navigating political, community, peer and student storms may lend well towards moving the needle away from early or unexpected turnover. While campus environment in general (35%) was found culprit for most CDO turnovers, more begs to be discovered about CDO lived experiences from the seat of his/her office and "backstage" conversations. Moreover, CDO preferred workplace conditions should be up for discussion to discern challenges, infrastructures, resources and relationships perceived to impede progress for matter culminate into loss of talent for the institution.

Underutilized Skill of the Trade

More than 25% of respondents confirm that they do not use the skill “fostering authentic and relevant international exchanges.” Another 22% were undecided whether they used the skill or not. With nearly half the CDO population not engaged to a point of acknowledgeable confirmation, a rethinking the preparation for impact of social matters needs to be completed faster than we might imagine.

One skill that will be front and center soon is the ability to work with and unite domestic and international populations. CDO’s reporting that this skill gets executed by only 41% in the field leaves a dismal perspective on how institutions will deal with current divides of ethnic and international groups. With a rise in calls to suicide lines and palpable fears and anxieties (CCNewsnow, 2017), CDOs will need to ramp up this skill as early as yesterday. A related piece of data from the CoopLew survey suggests that CDO skill to influence “what is taught” (about international and diversity circumstances) at their institutions may evolve more acutely to “who is teaching” should international relations become more strained as the Trump administration unfolds.

Given these nuggets and several other findings with potential to provoke changes in CDO job descriptions, increases in resource allocations and yes, CDO transitions to places where people “get it”, the landscape for diversity administration is subject to renewed appeal or repeal as a change agent and expert on a pathway to the presidency. Either way, there is much to be concerned about when it comes to CDO development processes and the latitude afforded to CDOs with skills that are either largely untapped and unknown to CEOs and would-be supporters at colleges and universities.

Watch for the national release of the CoopLew National Survey on CDO Attitudes, Workplace Perceptions and Skill Applications via webinars and conference presentations late spring, 2017!