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**THEORY & PRACTICE**

# Diversity Programs Look to Involve White Males as Leaders

**Goal Is to Get Efforts  
More Into Mainstream,  
Create 'Sustainability'**

 By **ERIN WHITE**
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As a white male, tax partner Keith Ruth was surprised last year when he was asked to help lead PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP's diversity efforts. Some employees questioned his qualifications. But Chris Simmons, PwC's chief diversity officer, insisted. "A lot of the people we want to hear the message are white males," Mr. Simmons says.

The unusual tactic -- enlisting white males to foster diversity efforts -- is gaining currency at U.S. companies. White men run the diversity programs at big employers such as **Coca-Cola Co.** and **Southern Co.**'s Georgia Power unit. Coke last fall brought in a consultant to talk to employees about "engaging white men in diversity efforts." PwC and others have given white male managers part-time assignments to promote diversity alongside their regular jobs.


It's part of an effort to get diversity programs off the sidelines and into the mainstream of the business. Having a white man champion diversity efforts -- particularly one who works in operations rather than human resources -- can help bring other white males on board, the theory goes.

Too many diversity initiatives make white men feel defensive, says Frank McCloskey, a white male operations veteran named Georgia Power's first head of diversity in 2000 after the company was sued for allegedly discriminating against blacks in hiring and promotion. He believes firms must engage white men to change the company culture.

When Mr. McCloskey was appointed, 63% of Georgia Power's employees were white men. "How can we ever create sustainability if you don't have 63% of your work force feeling that there's something in it for them?" he asks.

At PwC, Mr. Simmons, who is black, heads a diversity program that includes mentoring, conferences, and one-on-one talks between partners and staffers who are women or minorities. Mr. Simmons comes from operations rather than human resources. Most recently he oversaw PwC's mergers and acquisitions. In July he will become managing partner for the region around Washington, D.C. The

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firm's new diversity chief will be tax partner Roy Weathers, who is also black.

Mr. Simmons became diversity chief in 2004 with a directive from PwC U.S. Chairman Dennis Nally to shift diversity concerns from a "side topic" to an integral part of operations. About the same time, the firm named diversity leaders for each of its four business units. These are senior executives with other jobs, who also are charged with integrating diversity concerns into routine business decisions, such as client assignments and promotions.

None of the diversity leaders was a white man. But Mr. Simmons believed that white men might pay more heed to diversity concerns if they hear them from a white man. "We really have to get away from this model of it just being white women and minority people," he says.

Mr. Simmons approached Mr. Ruth, an enthusiastic supporter of a tax group employee-diversity council. Mr. Ruth, who grew up in rural Georgia, was running PwC's tax practice for the southeast U.S. Mr. Ruth spent three weeks reading books Mr. Simmons recommended, including "It's the Little Things: Everyday Interactions That Anger, Annoy, and Divide the Races," by Lena Williams.

After the appointment was announced, Mr. Simmons says a few employees asked why he had placed a white male in the role. "I said it sends the message that we think all kinds of people can be committed to diversity," he says.

Early on, Mr. Ruth asked the tax practice's regional leaders to periodically review client assignments to make sure projects were being distributed equitably. He also ordered a review of performance evaluations to make sure women and minorities received sufficient feedback and career advice. He asked the other regional leaders in the tax practice to form employee-diversity councils like the one he had helped run in the southeast. And he is organizing a conference focused on career issues for women.

Mr. Ruth says he has learned from the job, too. Through one-on-one talks with younger accountants, he realized that minorities sometimes lack the alumni network that can help advance careers. "It's little things like that which I don't think most partners knew," he says.

For his part, Mr. Simmons says Mr. Ruth has been "bringing some people into the fold that I probably would have a harder time" reaching.

**Write to Erin White at [erin.white@wsj.com](mailto:erin.white@wsj.com)**<sup>1</sup>

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