Workforce America!
Managing Employee Diversity
As a Vital Resource

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Reviewed by Lydia Morris Brown

PART I: RAISING AWARENESS

Chapter One: Diversity in the 90s (14 pages)

Within the next decade, the demographics of the American workplace will continue to shift dramatically away from the Euro-American male majority to populations characterized by diversity and segmentation. This new plurality will include people of all races, ethnic backgrounds, ages, lifestyles, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and physical capabilities. This new workforce will no longer deny its identity to fit into the organization’s mainstream, but will demand respect and support from employers and colleagues. Managers will be challenged to replace the “cookie-cutter” approach to dealing with human diversity.

The divisions that exist in the labor force also exist throughout society, leading to a less homogenized market. Organizations can learn to diversify their appeals only by hiring employees who represent the broad spectrum of society and then tapping their ideas.
Most managers are not prepared to address the issue of how to effectively manage diversity. Many managers do not consider this an issue, feeling that a diverse workplace has been commonplace for years. For the most part, mainstream managers have viewed diversity as a disruptive liability, making “vigorous indifference” their primary management strategy.

This attitude is no longer viable and must be replaced with comprehensive approaches to valuing and managing employee difference—a shift that requires three essential steps: (1) recognizing America’s enormous cultural and ethnic diversity, (2) learning to value the full spectrum of that diversity, and (3) finding common ground on which to build relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect.

Chapter Two: Dimensions of Diversity (19 pages)

Although the public and private sectors define diversity as gender and race, employee diversity encompasses many other crucial differences. In objective terms, diversity is the vast, eclectic array of human physical and cultural differences—“otherness”—those human qualities that make us different.

Dimensions describe the properties and characteristics that constitute the whole person. Primary dimensions of diversity are immutable differences that we were either born with or which impact us early in the socialization process and continue throughout our lives. These core elements are age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, and sexual orientation. Secondary dimensions are mutable differences acquired, discarded, and/or modified throughout our lives and include education, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs, and work experience.

Taken together, these dimensions significantly influence values, perceptions, and prior experiences, providing us with a unique perspective about our environment.

America is a more racially segregated society than many realize. Throughout the U.S., most people live in homogeneous communities not only segregated by race, but by many other dimensions. Thus, the workplace is usually our first exposure to diversity. Due to the myths, assumptions, and stereotypes we carry with us, we may be unable to establish productive working relationships with the others we encounter.

When communication between diverse people breaks down, bad feelings, lower productivity, heightened resistance, and the reinforcement of preconceived ideas about otherness follow. Organizations that value diversity have a competitive advantage at home and globally. Thus, the decision to value diversity will not be social, moral, or legal, but will be based on the bottom line.

While valuing diversity is a philosophy, managing it is a vital resource and a skill requiring knowledge, sensitivity, patience, flexibility, and training. Organizations must evaluate their cultures and determine what needs to change. Managers must assess their own readiness to value difference. These assessments must begin with an examination of the historical assumptions made about employee diversity that have led to the chronic devaluing of others whose core dimensions are different from those of Western Europe’s white, heterosexual, physically able-bodied males. In this environment the historical assumptions are:

- Otherness is seen as a deficiency that poses a threat to the organization’s effectiveness;
- Expressing discomfort with the dominant group’s values is oversensitivity;
- Others want to become, and should become, more like the dominant group;
- Equal treatment means the same treatment; and
- Managing diversity requires changing the people, not the culture.

About the Authors

Marilyn Loden, an organizational change consultant, works with many leading corporations in their efforts to value employee diversity and develop pluralistic leadership. She also wrote Feminine Leadership, or How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys (1985).

Judy B. Rosener, Ph.D., professor at the Graduate School of Management, University of California at Irvine, teaches and researches cultural diversity and management. Her work has appeared in various publications, including Harvard Business Review, New York Times Magazine, and Business World.
Chapter Three: The Dynamics of Assimilation
(18 pages)

Universally applying dominant group standards to employee performance and style, continuously testing the competency of diverse employees, maintaining closed communication networks and decision-making systems, and suppressing support groups for diverse employees reinforces the value of homogeneity and are common practices in most traditional organizations. Most employees accept them as the status quo without challenge.

Those in the mainstream fail to recognize that their success is linked to the norms, bias, and traditions of the culture, that they benefit and are supported by this culture, but that they attribute their success to their own individual efforts. At the same time, they expect diverse employees to require special concessions in order to succeed. Once this cultural myopia is recognized, managers can institute an education effort to increase their own awareness or the barriers created by assimilation.

Part II: Managing Key Issues

Chapter Four: Beyond Stereotypes—Developing Authentic Relationships With Diverse Others
(23 pages)

Stereotypes, unlike generalizations which are based on knowledge and experience, are not helpful in processing information. They are distortions that support an underlying prejudice about others, reinforcing a superior/inferior belief system. Because we develop prejudice and stereotypes as a result of our early homogeneous socialization, accurate information about others is limited. The narrow, inflexible expectations inherent in stereotypes cause us to continuously react to and reinforce particular responses in others; thus, increasing the occurrence of the behavior. Understanding this process is the first step in rectifying it. Everyone can minimize the impact of personal prejudices, but those who are members of the dominant group and who have organized power can do a great deal to change the institutional culture. Once we accept our personal prejudices as an inevitability of socialization, we can take a critical, honest look at what we were conditioned to believe about others; thus, gaining awareness of how these beliefs have influenced our past behavior. This is an ongoing awareness development process and constitutes a prolonged period of discovery and recovery.

Calling attention to core differences has generally been confused with stereotyping and is considered impolite. But, because acknowledging affirms and supports the legitimacy and value of differences, recognizing otherness is not the same as making negative prejudgments that discount and delimit.

Chapter Five: Decoding Garbled Communication
(24 pages)

Jokes, metaphors, innuendoes, and everyday language can demean otherness; thus, communication in diverse organizations requires more sensitivity and skill than ever. Managers must increase their knowledge of what is appropriate and inappropriate in communications with diverse groups, as well as how they and others use the key elements of style. These elements are linked to sociocultural conditioning and the dimensions of diversity.

Chapter Six: Understanding Group Dynamics and Minimizing Collusion (15 pages)

The philosophy of valuing diversity empowers all employees to use their skills and experience creatively. On the other hand, when diversity is not managed as a vital resource, productivity and morale suffer. As diversity increases, open membership, shared influences, mutual respect, and candor become significant factors in effective functioning. Additionally, they decrease stereotyping, empower employees to contribute, and help members manage new relationships and unfamiliar situations more effectively.

One of the most destructive group dynamics is collusion. It represents excessive accommodation and causes us to conceal our true feelings and preferences. By reinforcing the status quo, it effectively maintains stereotyping about otherness through silence, denial, or active cooperation.

Organizations that value diversity support those who refuse to collude by regarding them as catalysts for productive change rather than malcontents or whistle blowers.

Chapter Seven: Managing Culture Clash
(18 pages)

In general, organizations that value homogeneity are characterized by cultures that are biased towards the masculine experience and male-oriented behavior—
competitiveness, hierarchy, a win/lose approach to conflict resolution, rationalism, and emphasis on analytic skills. Rather than question these deeply held values, new employees learn to adapt its model as their own. For others, this adaptation leads to futile behavior modification. More and more, others are beginning to organize and lobby for change. Such initiatives, however, often create confusion, frustration, and misunderstanding (culture clash)—draining energy, commitment, and other resources.

Dealing with culture clash has become an issue of survival. It is critical for managers to anticipate the types of culture clash that will occur as others become the majority in the workplace. Organizations that view diversity as a positive change rather than a necessary evil will attract the best workforce, and will be more effective in managing the transition from assimilation to valuing diversity. While some clash is inevitable, it will likely lead to enhancements rather than generate threat and confusion.

Chapter Eight: Establishing Common Ground (20 pages)

Successfully valuing diversity requires a set of universal principles for coalescing, coordinating, and directing the actions of all employees. Paradoxically, this means that there is a simultaneous need for greater differentiation and greater common ground. In the absence of commonly held principles, diversity can become unruly and divisive. Others must have an active role in shaping the culture. The mainstream culture must become the culture of diversity, operating from guiding principles that every individual, regardless of core identity, can support. Focusing on employee education without examining the ways in which organization values and practices may need to change is counterproductive.

PART III: DIVERSITY AND ORGANIZATION CHANGE

Chapter Nine: Valuing Diversity in Leading-Edge Organizations (21 pages)

Leading-edge organizations have a declared commitment to the value of diversity and are actively engaged in institutionalizing this philosophy. Although programs and policies vary significantly, they seem to share three characteristics: the support and involvement of senior managers, a “different but equal” operating philosophy, and expanded definitions of effective performance.

These institutions also share common practices:

- Diversity is linked to strategic vision,
- Management takes responsibility for setting the climate,
- Systems and procedures support diversity,
- Recruitment, promotion, and development trends are continuously monitored,
- Awareness education is an organization priority,
- Rewards are based on results rather than style, and
- Subtle reinforcers of homogeneity are attended to.

A new set of assumptions begins to operate once diversity is accepted as an organization value. Employees are accepted as a competitive advantage, it is accepted that the organization is in transit, and it is accepted that the culture, not the people, must change.

Chapter Ten: The Pluralistic Leader (16 pages)

In organizations that value diversity, effective managers are those with the skills required to empower diverse employees, moving beyond current models of participative leadership to become pluralistic leaders. This model is based on the assumption that something valuable can be learned from employees and that the organization needs to change if diversity is to become a true asset.

Chapter Eleven: Creating the Culture of Diversity (20 pages)

A culture of diversity is “an institutional environment built on the values of fairness, diversity, mutual responsibility, understanding, and cooperation; where shared goals, rewards, performance standards, operating norms, and a common vision of the future guide the efforts of every employee and manager.” Valuing diversity moves beyond affirmative action by focusing on the quality of the work environment and improving the utilization of the skills of all employees.
Chapter Twelve: Workplace 2000—From Assimilation to Valuing Diversity (7 pages)

Embracing diversity requires a willingness to invest the time and effort necessary to understand the concepts. As less energy is expended managing interpersonal conflicts and culture clash, long-term advantages will be:

- Fuller utilization of human capital;
- Reduced interpersonal conflict among others;
- Enhanced work relations based on mutual respect and increased knowledge of multicultural issues;
- A shared organization vision and increased commitment among diverse employees at all levels and function;
- Greater innovation and flexibility as others participate more in key decision-making and problem-solving groups; and
- Improved productivity.

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A chapter-by-chapter synopsis, a bibliography by subject, and a subject index are provided. Reference notes appear at the end of each chapter.

Remarks

Presentation

Workforce is two entire courses—one in social-psychology, and the other in pluralistic, diversity-valuing leadership—each packed into one slim volume. Clarity, conciseness, pace, excellent theme development, and a concept, provocative and profound by virtue of its simplicity, make this possible. Although this can be considered an authoritative work, it is packaged for accessibility to almost anyone.

Each chapter follows a logical, clearly delineated outline. Definitions, key phases, and major points are in bold type throughout and easily identified for easy reference.

Content

The authors contend that—contrary to what some believe—managing diversity as an asset does not require expertise in cultural differences. The only prerequisite is a framework for analyzing the impact of personal values, beliefs, and achievements; group dynamics; and institutional policies, practices, and norms. Workforce provides such a framework. The concepts are so simple and so obvious, one realizes that all along, the whole of society has been missing the forest because of the trees.

Of particular value is the clarity of the definitions and explanations when seen in the context of dominant group versus otherness group socialization and values. Terms such as diversity, homogeneity, myths, stereotypes, prejudice, etc.—terms whose meanings we take for granted—acquire an entirely new character. In addition to the personal/theoretical dimension, one is now able to see them in a more viable person/practical framework. This new point-of-view forces the reader to begin to examine, more objectively, the practical outcome of his or her personal beliefs.

Workforce allows us to acknowledge that there are differences among groups as well as individuals. It forces us to admit that we are all subject to prejudices, but that prejudice is a natural product of socialization, and that once we understand this fact we can begin to change it. Admitting the disease is the first step toward a cure. This book, born out of the authors’ convictions that people want to be part of the cure, but lack the awareness and the skills, provides the impetus for that important first step.

Reading Suggestions

Reading Time: 4 to 6 hours, 250 Pages in Book

Valuing diversity is a timely and critical concept, and the more we learn, the better off we all are. Thus, we suggest that you read the book in its entirety. The Table of Contents and the chapter synopses provide overviews of the material.
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