



Does Your Organization Welcome Diversity?

PRODUCTIVITY AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE ARE THE REWARDS
FOR BUSINESSES THAT ACTIVELY INCLUDE RATHER THAN
EXCLUDE PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS.

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Inclusion' is a term bandied about when people talk about a diverse work environment. It implies a comprehensive openness... an environment that welcomes any person who can do the job, regardless of his or her race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity or physical ability.

How is this attitude reflected in real organizational life? For starters, it means that if I'm 55 and applying for a job, it's not automatically assumed that I'm unemployable because I'm too old. If I'm a male who wears an earring, it is not assumed that I'm an undesirable employee because I'm gay. Rather, it is understood that my sexual orientation is irrelevant to my ability to do the job successfully.

It also means that when promotions are made or opinions sought, it won't be assumed that women are too soft and too nurturing to handle bottom line tasks, that Asians are too quiet or too meek to make good managers, or that African Americans are too aggressive and challenging to be team players. In an inclusive environment, what counts is a person's ability to do the job, and no one is disadvantaged because of background.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

What's in it for your organization to embrace such diversity and create a more welcoming climate?

In our increasingly interconnected world, the profitability prize will go to the most resourceful, talented, productive organizations. This goal can be accomplished with a rich staff mix. Historically, interaction between cultures has always been a source of knowledge, growth and progress. The Crusades marked a turning point in European history and ushered in the Renaissance because of the knowledge, ideas and projects the Crusaders brought from the Muslim world. Coastal trading ports continue to have preeminence in every country because they are points of contact between cultures.

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY YIELDS BETTER PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND ALL-AROUND BETTER RESULTS

Organizations tell us their biggest benefit (other than the fabulous ethnic restaurants!)

from a diverse workforce is the problem solving that results. When East meets West, for example, wonderful differences occur in thinking. The East has a highly intuitive thinking style while the West is known for its highly developed analytical skill. The blend can yield great results in producing creative solutions to problems.

ORGANIZATIONAL VITALITY RESIDES IN THE ADAPTABILITY TO CHANGE

Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, said, "Change is not necessary to life, it is life." Economic survival in this day and age depends on an organization's ability to make corrections and change directions at a moment's notice. Entrenched attitudes and practices will only yield obsolescence. Diversity requires organizations and adaptation.

AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT CAPTURES COMMITMENT

Accepting people for who they are is the bone marrow of an inclusive organization. This means that each person is valued for the individual talents he or she brings to the task at hand. Employees rarely produce their best work when they are forced into a rigid organizational mold. If your corporate culture allows enough latitude to accept all backgrounds and if employees feel included, you will get peak performance from your staff. That is inclusion at its best.

SYMPTOMS OF INCLUSION

Achieving an inclusive organization does not happen overnight. To create an open culture in your work place, start by measuring your organization's mindset against the following criteria:

- _____ All segments of your population are represented in your executive suite.
- _____ Air time at meetings is not dominated by any one group.
- _____ Ethnic, racial and sexual slurs or jokes are not heard.
- _____ Cliquishness between groups is absent.
- _____ Variety in dress and grooming is the norm.
- _____ Warm, collegial relationships exist between people of diverse backgrounds.
- _____ There is sensitivity and awareness regarding different religious and ethnic holidays and customs.
- _____ Selection of food and refreshments at organizationally sponsored functions takes into account religious and personal preferences.

These eight examples of inclusion are by no means an exhaustive list, but they are a starting point. Check those that currently exist in your company, then get to work on others. What might you gain in productivity and commitment if, for example, it was no longer acceptable to tell jokes at some group's expense? What would be the result of acknowledging the holidays of your multicultural staff in a company newsletter or in the cafeteria?

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