

FACING THE FUTURE: THE BROAD REACH OF DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

As we become an increasingly diverse world population, the diversity of organizations should also be increasing. Organizations themselves are diverse in size, structure, earnings, design, and purpose. Included are schools, churches, governments, nonprofits, retailers, service providers, co-ops, farms, and countless entities in which people earn a living and interact with others. Success, or failure, of organizations will be greatly influenced by the ability to attract, retain, and maximize the contributions of people from all backgrounds and from around the world. It will be influenced by the ability to market to diverse customers, to engage diverse constituents, and to encourage full participation of every worker and potential worker.

³² For example, see Cozzarelli, C., Tagler, M. J., & Wilkinson, A. V. (2001). "Attitudes toward the Poor and Attributions for Poverty." *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(2): 207–228.

³³ Working out of Poverty. (2003). p. 1.

As the world becomes more globally connected, discrimination, harassment, and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, family status, physical or mental ability, weight, appearance, and other irrelevant factors will be increasingly unwise, unprofitable, and unacceptable. At the same time, as the world's population becomes more diverse, this diversity will bring new challenges, threats, and opportunities. Included are the propensity to stereotype and discriminate, to hoard rather than to help, and to fight for resources believed to be scarce. Rather than stereotyping, hoarding, and fighting, those who understand the value in diversity would expect that inclusion of the ideas and input of more and more diverse contributors would result in more resources to be shared. Organizations and their leaders should welcome the challenges of diversity, minimize the threats, and capitalize on the opportunities resulting from diversity.

Attending to "diversity in organizations" is necessary, but not sufficient to increase organizational diversity. Organizations cannot be separated from individuals and society, nor can individuals and society be separated from organizations. Diversity among individuals in the population should result in diversity in organizations. Without conscious efforts to ensure that it does, however, historical evidence and the current status of many groups clearly indicates that it will not. The ideas proposed by Cox and Blake, which have been central to the discussion of why diversity should be valued and pursued, are only part of the picture. When organizations pursue diversity solely to obtain cost, resource acquisition, marketing, creativity, problem solving, system flexibility, and other advantages this will help some individuals improve their circumstances. Indeed, for these individuals, an organization's self-interested pursuit of diversity is personally helpful. And, if sufficient numbers of individuals in a group are helped, the group's overall position will improve to some extent. However, these are surface and shallow changes, incapable of long-term, sustainable progress. For long-term change to occur, a fundamental shift in views of the value in diversity and the reasons to pursue it must occur. Rather than seeing diversity solely as a means of gaining competitive advantage, this shift would require changed views of ourselves, our prejudices and biases, our personal attitudes, and our behaviors. It involves willingness to pursue and to advance societal changes that will reduce widespread inequity among people of the world. Diversity in organizations is but one aspect of such societal changes.