

Chapter 89

Diversity and the Need for Cross-Cultural Leadership and Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

This chapter identifies current issues and methods for enhancing organizational climate by and through practices that embrace, promote and accommodate diversity and cross-cultural collaboration. We identify ongoing areas of insensitivity and focus on practices that individuals and organizations need to develop in order to accommodate diversity, and to cultivate cross-cultural collaboration and leadership development. Future leaders must possess skills that are just and respectful of increasing difference in organizations. We believe higher education is the logical site for developing these skills and practices but before we can fully enjoy the benefits of diverse organizations and communities, we must develop and practice these skills at colleges and universities – organizations whose ongoing social relevance may very well depend on their efforts and abilities to prepare culturally-competent graduates for work in the globalizing workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Open any college recruitment brochure and in vibrant color is a feast for the eyes of the diversity advocate: students from multiple identities, active and smiling, clearly friendly, and all wearing the university's branded sweatshirts. This overt depiction of diversity exists for a number of reasons: 1). Higher education is under constant pressure to adopt organizational practices that make it appear more effective, modern, and desirable to attend (Birnbaum, 2000), 2). Diversity has become synonymous with progress and inclusion in higher education and may be in part the result of isomorphism, an organizational process where institutions evolve toward similarity across a field (DiMaggio, 1983), 3). Diversity enhances the

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quality and competence of learning and work environments (Chang, 2010; Cuyjet, 2006; Milem, 2001; Roth, 2014), and 4). Diversity is no longer a prospect but a reality (Smith, 2009).

At the same time, diversity has become a commodity: a veil of social progress that thinly obscures a growing segregation (Carnevale, 2013), economic disparity (Oliver, 1995; Shapiro, 2013), and racial intolerance across the U.S., both on college campuses (Byng, 2014; Cabrera, 2009; Confirmed Facts About the Machine, 2011; Kingkade, 2014) and subsequently in cities and communities (Alvarez, 2013; Egelko, 2013; Song, 2010), and ultimately in the globalizing workplace. These outcomes are reproduced on a growing number of U.S. college and university campuses, and are often reified by media representations (Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2011, 2015, 2014) that place groups of difference in opposition to dominant culture, with less and less regard for social justice (Alexander, 2010; Harris, 2003; Rose, 2002; Wheelock, 2006; Yosso, 2004).

Diversity also can be linked to many compelling issues confronting us, both domestically and internationally, including immigration, addressing ongoing inequities, and creating effective learning and work spaces (Gold, 2006; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2014; Van Heertum, 2009). These are not incidental matters and it may be time to make concerted efforts to relieve the historic wrongs that have played out in U.S. higher education, employment, and political representation, since America has long been viewed as a global leader, and transmits its ideology, values, and desires across the globe through U.S. business, media, and politics (Gold, 2006; Ritter, 2014; Roth, 2014; Van Heertum, 2009).

U.S. higher education, then, is at the nexus of needed redress, since college campuses remain both bastions for social change and stalwarts for the status quo, making them important sites for interrogating implications associated with the acceptance of difference in a multicultural community (Ritter, 2014). Experiences and behaviors learned at college are memorable moments that likely linger and inform future points of view (Hu, 2003). Lack of or negative experience across difference in college ultimately has implications for the globalizing work place, and globalization translates at the organizational level to greater diversity among employees, managers, students, professors, customers, vendors, abilities, religions, ethnicities, immigration statuses, genders, identities, and worldviews (Lieber, 2002; Morey, 2004; Paoletti, 2006; Stiglitz, 2007; Torres, 2006). We believe that even this laundry list definition of diversity is insufficient for preparing students, colleges, organizations and employees for the inescapable onset of greater diversity in every facet of life, and we address the potentiality for an expanded definition of diversity later in this chapter.

Organizations need to consider diversity as critical to operations as technology planning and resource allocation, and centralize it in virtually all organizational practices and decision-making processes (Charles, 2014; Smith, 2009). Such change has implications for power dynamics within organizations (Cornell, 2007; Hackman, 1985; Sidanius, 1991), which may be in part why organizations have more readily adopted radical changes in operation due to technology than radical changes in operation due to accommodating human difference. The latter requires a shift in power in organizations that remain managed in significant part by white executives (Patton, 2013; Smith, 2009).

While corporate, education and non-profit organizations differ in significant ways, there also are significant organizational similarities (DiMaggio, 1983; Meyer, 1977; Pfeffer, 1978; Santos, 2007; Schmidtlein, 1987; Weick, 1976). For these reasons, we adopt the practice of referring to organizations interchangeably, given that all are sites where individuals congregate, interact and exchange knowledge.

This chapter draws on recent research by the authors and from other empirical findings and models to provide a view of the current state of the field and what work individuals and organizations need to do

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