

# ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL “DIVERSITY” PROCESS: PART II

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In Part I of this two-part set of articles, I described the “traditional approach to diversity,” and argued that we really should call it the “traditional approach to the promotion of inclusion and equal opportunity.” I contended further that while the traditional framework could produce some impressive progress; ultimately, these gains are not sustainable.

Here, in Part II, I outline the parameters of the Strategic Diversity Management Model and offer it as a complement for the traditional. Together, these two models can generate a “diversity process” with sustainable advances.

## THE STRATEGIC DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT MODEL

The core elements of this approach have evolved over the past fifteen years. As with the traditional, the major attributes can be thought of as root assumptions, principles, practices, benefits, and challenges.

### Root Assumptions

Several assumptions lay the groundwork for the Diversity Management approach, and they differ significantly from those that make up the foundation for the traditional perspective.

*Diversity refers to any collective mixture characterized by differences and similarities.* While this

definition obviously covers a mixture of employees, it also embraces any other mixture one might encounter.

*The tasks of promoting inclusion and equal opportunity can be viewed as diversity issues.* Stated differently, the more inclusion and the more equal opportunity a corporation generates, the greater the probability of substantial, significant diversity among employees. This holds regardless of whether a manager intends to foster diversity.

*Accordingly, lessons and insights for addressing the diversity generated by efforts to bring about greater inclusion and equal opportunity might be gleanings for studying the dynamics of other mixtures.* In particular, the following disciplines might offer some fruitful gleanings: general management (functional integration, management of multiple lines of business, management of acquisitions and mergers, and globalization), Botany, Zoology, Biology, politics, family relations, and anthropology.

*Difficulty in dealing with diversity (mixtures characterized by differences and similarities) can contribute to difficulty in achieving sustainable progress with inclusion and equal opportunity.* For example, if through the traditional approach, a corporation achieves greater inclusion and simultaneously and

incidentally greater diversity, the sustainment of progress will require an ability to address the newly created diversity. In the absence of such a capability, sustainment of progress will be less likely.

Interestingly, having difficulty with diversity can be independent of the degree to which one is a racist. One may be a racist and be capable of addressing diversity effectively. One may be free of racism and lack the ability to respond effectively to diversity.

*The more capable an organization's members are with diversity, the better prepared the organization will be for the challenges that can come with effective implementation of the traditional model.* The basic implication here is that Diversity Management can complement the traditional framework and enhance the likelihood of sustainable progress.

A key observation here is that, in sum, these assumptions suggest that racism and sexism may not be the only significant sources of difficulty in bringing about inclusion and equal opportunity. The assumptions imply that failure to broaden your scope can hinder the sustaining of progress. In other words, achieving inclusion and equal opportunity may be more difficult than suggested by the traditional perspective with its emphasis on the "isms."

### **Principles**

From the limited experience that exists with the implications of the Diversity Management model, certain principles are emerging. While they parallel those of the

traditional model, they differ greatly in context and emphasis.

*Mindset shifts are critical and essential.* Given that most US organizations have firmly endorsed the need for progress with inclusion and equal opportunity, and have not focused on diversity and Diversity Management as defined here, a major mind shift and expansion will be required to embrace the traditional and complementary approaches.

This will not be easy. Strong emotions surround these issues. For some, advocating Diversity Management will be viewed as a watering down or abandoning of the traditional perspective and its emphasis on eliminating the "isms." Yet, if the shift does not occur, limited progress will be made in evolving Diversity Management as a complement.

*Conceptual clarity must be achieved.* Simultaneous with the mindset shift, organizational participants at a minimum must gain conceptual clarity with respect to the following:

- Managing Workforce Representation (assuring the presence of different groups in the workforce at the desired levels and to the extent desired.)
- Understanding Differences (assuring harmonious relationships among the various groups represented in the workforce)
- Managing Workforce Diversity (assuring the development of organizational capability to deal with differences and similarities in the workforce)

- Strategic Diversity Management (assuring the development of organizational capability to deal with differences and similarities in any aspect of the corporation's operations, and not just in human resources).

***The representation (inclusion) and diversity questions must be asked.***

Unless these inquiries are raised and answered, progress will be inhibited.

- Representation (inclusion)
  - What groups do we want represented in the workforce?
  - To what extent do we want each group represented?
- Diversity?
  - What kind (if any) variations do we want in work force behavior?
  - To what extent do we want behavior variations?

Most corporations have agreed in principle that they want to be inclusive, but have not specified for which groups representation is sought, or to what extent. Without these specifics, it is difficult to be clear as to what would constitute success.

Generally speaking, corporations have not entertained the behavior variation inquiry. The assumption typically has been that assimilation would inhibit any behavior diversity that might come as a byproduct of inclusion. Although the efficacy of assimilation in this regard is declining, managers have not been specific as to their stand on behavior diversity.

Typically, when a manager endorses "diversity" s/he is referring to representation through which a mixture of people with different attributes will be created. However, the expectation has been that assimilation will keep behavior fluctuations from the norm in check.

***A high level of comfort must be achieved with diversity tension.*** If an organization has diversity, it will have diversity tension. Its participants will have to develop the wherewithal to pursue common objectives effectively in the midst of tensions, similarities and differences. This is at the core of Diversity Management.

Tension does not equate with conflict. Two persons may experience tension between themselves indefinitely without it ever escalating into conflict. Effective management of diversity requires the individual to be comfortable with this state of affairs and not lose focus of personal and organizational objectives.

***The business rationale for fostering inclusion and equal opportunity, as well as Diversity Management, must be clear.*** Because of the magnitude of effort and change required to promote inclusion and equal opportunity, not to mention the culture change implicit in the Diversity Management model, emphasis must be placed on the business rationale. Further, experience with the traditional perspective suggests that legal, moral and social responsibility motives are not sufficient to generate sustainable progress.

Diversity Management does not call for abandoning these traditional motives, but

rather adding the business rationale. The necessity of adding the business perspective reflects the complexity of achieving and sustaining inclusion and equal opportunity.

***Organizational culture must be examined and modified as necessary.***

Diversity Management does not assume that organizational culture supports the required changes, but rather calls for an assessment of the root assumptions and their manifestations. Where aspects of culture appear incongruent with the organization's equal opportunity, inclusion and diversity aspirations, they must be changed to be supportive or be removed.

Diversity Management recognizes that if an organization's culture does not mesh with its equal opportunity and inclusive objects, progress would be inhibited. The inability of many organizations to undergo a cultural change has been a major contributor to their being caught up in the frustrating cycle discussed earlier.

***The organization and its participants must become Effective Diversity***

***Respondents (EDRs).*** EDRs possess the ability to respond to diversity mixtures in a manner that maximizes the achievement of organizational and personal goals.

The individual is the cornerstone of the organization's Diversity Management capability. Accordingly, managers and individual contributors must develop an ability to respond individually and collectively to diversity mixtures appropriately.

***Community progress with Diversity Management must be encouraged.*** Often

when executives first differentiate between the perspectives of the traditional and Diversity Management, they ask, "How am I to do this with society stuck in the traditional mode?" They complain that any progress would be compromised as their associates moved back and forth between the company and their communities.

The achievement of sustainable progress in corporations will require that they foster the adoption of Diversity Management in their communities. Not to foster community endorsement and affirmation would place the efforts of corporations at risk. This means the companies will have to assume a leadership role, given that most communities have not placed Diversity Management on their agenda.

### **Illustrative Practices**

To affirm the principles and assumptions of Diversity Management, some practices are likely to become critical determinants of success. They, too, will reflect the differentiation between the traditional and evolving framework.

#### ***Strong CEO Support.***

CEOs will have to take the lead along many fronts. Perhaps, most importantly, they will have to model the mind shift process. They will have to go through the educational process for evolving the mindset expansion.

This will be increasingly critical. Because Diversity Management moves in a direction different than that of the traditional,

organizational participants will seek assurances of their CEOs' buy-in and understanding.

Once CEOs have achieved the necessary mindset shift, they will have to model the dual initialization of the traditional and the complementary. At a minimum, their words and actions will need to reflect conceptual clarity and a commitment to both.

The CEO will have to foster a broad application of Diversity Management whenever it would be strategically beneficial to the corporation. This means application beyond diverse human resource mixtures. Broader applications will strengthen the business case.

A final arena requiring CEO leadership will center around the explicit addressing of the representation and diversity questions. Corporations lack experience with these inquiries and will need guidance and encouragement to sufficiently deal with them.

**Education and Training.** Both will be required to assist managers and individual contributors to become Effective Diversity Respondents. Education will be needed to facilitate the requisite mindset shift, while training will be essential for the acquisition of diversity skills: (1) identification of diversity mixtures, (2) analysis of diversity mixtures, and (3) selection of appropriate responses to diversity mixtures.

**Cultural Change.** At the heart of Diversity Management are the tasks of assessing and modifying culture as needed. Here, reference is made not just to manifestations, but also to root cultural assumptions. These tasks have enormous implications for sustainability.

**Development of the Business Case.** Implementation in large part will be determined by the degree to which a compelling business case is developed and imbued throughout the organization. Without this rationale, motivation will likely be insufficient to bring about the magnitude and complexity of change implicit in the traditional and complement approaches together.

**Application Sessions.** Since we are institutionalizing Diversity Management as an acquired capability to be used when and where it may be beneficial, practice in initialization must be encouraged. An application session allows participants to apply Diversity Management to a diversity mixture. Executives, managers, and individual contributors must participate. The broader the participation across hierarchical levels, the greater the credibility of the process.

**Community Involvement.** Given the community's contextual importance as discussed earlier, executives must reach out to influence its thinking. In this regard, corporations might invite community leaders to briefings, or they might fund educational efforts in the community. The goal would be to broaden the external environment's perspective on equal opportunity and inclusion issues.

### **Illustrative Benefits**

Two major benefits are likely. The first is an enhanced likelihood of sustainable progress with equal opportunity and inclusion; primarily, because of less backlash.

White males are included in the definition of diversity. So,

Diversity Management aspires to create an environment that accesses the talent of all employees.

Because Diversity Management does not position differences as implicitly bad, and because it encompasses all differences and similarities, minorities and women are likely to feel less “targeted” and, therefore, less susceptible to stigmatization. Also, Diversity Management acknowledges that the individual and the organization must be open to change, as opposed to the burden of adaptation being solely that of the person who is “different.”

This acknowledgement likely would reduce the risk of stigmatization.

The combination of a lower probability of backlash and real cultural change greatly enhances the possibilities for sustainable progress. These aspects of Diversity Management match well with some of the traditional challenges.

Corporations effectively implementing Diversity Management also gain an enhanced capability to address all diversity mixtures. My experience has been that workforce mixtures are not the only ones requiring attention in corporate America. As corporations progress in acquiring Diversity Management capability, they are equipping themselves to deal with diversity issues beyond the workforce.

Indeed, some of these arenas often qualify more easily as “business” concerns as opposed to those related to the workforce. Examples would be diversity issues related to customers, functions, and globalization. In any event, this enhanced capability can bring significant gain.

## **Challenges**

Without a doubt, time and the magnitude of the implementation process are the two greatest challenges. They are related.

Implementation will demand enormous time for education and training, application practice sessions, and the modification of corporate culture. With respect to education and training, multiple sessions may be necessary, while the institutionalization of cultural change could require up to ten years.

In today’s competitive and dynamic economic culture, managers are reluctant to allow themselves or associates to be away from “work” for major chunks of time. Similarly, the short-term focus of many executives makes it unlikely that an organization can stay focused for the five or ten years required to institutionalize real cultural change.

For me, the challenge becomes not whether to proceed, but how to get around barriers to implementation. For example, electronic learning and greater use and access to computers may hold promise for more efficient and effective education and training. Enhanced skills within the core of a business might strengthen the time period a company can stay focused on one issue like cultural change. Clearly, innovation and creativity will be crucial for successful implementation.

So, what are the components of an effective diversity program? There are the traditional approach to equal opportunity and inclusion, and the Diversity Management Model.

Indeed, these two frameworks complement each other nicely. Given the challenges of implementation, where should a manager begin? I think that four steps can provide a launching context.

**Step 1:** Determine where your company is with respect to the traditional and Diversity Management approaches. I suspect that most companies either are only utilizing the traditional, or using some unclear hybrid of both. Few companies are considering pursuing a clear, well-defined, parallel model encompassing both approaches. In any case, clarity as to where you are is a critical first step.

**Step 2:** Foster conceptual clarity throughout the organization. This conceptual clarity provides a necessary framework for assessing where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there.

**Step 3:** Determine where you need to be, given your company's mission, vision, strategy and equal opportunity/inclusion aspirations. In this stage, change leaders should at least develop an initial draft of a compelling business case.

**Step 4:** Develop a plan for closing the gap and secure buy-in from key influences. Ideally, upon conclusion of this stage, change leaders and organizational decision-makers possess conceptual clarity, awareness of the company's status with respect to the two approaches, recognition of where the company needs to be, understanding of the business case, and a plan of action.

Obviously, much more could be said about each step. The goal here has been simply to

outline how one might begin forward movement.

## THE SUCCESSFUL PROCESS

It is becoming increasingly clear that successful diversity processes will be a mixture of the "traditional" and "strategic" models. Implementing such "diverse" diversity processes will be difficult.

The irony is that Diversity Management capability (the ability to address a mixture characterized by differences and similarities) is required to develop and implement a process comprised of the "traditional" and "strategic." Accordingly, progress in understanding the Strategic Diversity Management Process and acquiring the Diversity Management skills will be a requisite for managing a "diverse" diversity process.

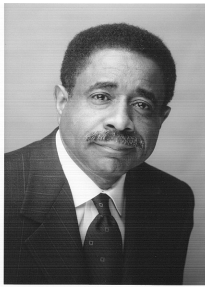
In addition to the need for a minimum level of Diversity Management capability, the intense emotional commitment that can exist with respect to inclusion and equal opportunity promises to be a barrier to implementation. This attachment can lead to the view that any complement represents a retreat from traditional goals. To the contrary, the "strategic" represents not a diminishing of commitment to the promotion of inclusion and equal opportunity, but rather an enhancement of the likelihood of sustainable gains.

Even more challenging will be the reality that most diversity practitioners are unaware of anything other than the traditional. Many argue that all "diversity" practices are the same, and that "diversity" is simply a new label for work that has been underway for thirty or forty years. For those

individuals, nothing exists but the traditional. Obviously, these practitioners will be “diversity-challenged” with any effort to combine the two approaches.

Regardless of implementation challenges, organizations desiring success with diversity will have to master the diversification of their approaches. Otherwise, they risk being in a continuous frustrating cycle indefinitely.

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