

# The Diversity Directive

Why Some Initiatives Fail & What To Do About It



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# **THE DIVERSITY DIRECTIVE:**

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# P R E F A C E

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## Background of This Book

Whether the topic was demographic changes, cultural sensitivity at work, or valuing differences among one's colleagues, the 1985–95 decade was a time to jump on the diversity bandwagon. People recognized anew both the interdependence of human beings and the necessity of diversity for organizational survival today. They saw with fresh eyes that the ways people differ lead to either crisis or opportunity: Crisis comes when differences cause conflict and block synergy. Opportunity abounds when differences are combined to create synergy.

So ready or not, organizations of all sorts rushed to implement some type of diversity initiative. Thousands of workers throughout the nation have taken part in one or more days of diversity training.

The most popular initiative was diversity awareness training. Understandably, awareness training focused on individuals, although to be effective diversity work must address organizational systems as well. Reflecting and promoting the individual emphasis, the diversity training and consulting industry expanded dramatically.

As more workers were trained, employers created in-house diversity councils and supported the development of diversity networks linking similar affinity or resource groups across many organizations. The range of perspectives addressed by these networks likewise expanded. From a first concentration on race and gender, the range broadened to issues of culture, age, veterans' status, work life, sexual orientation, disabilities, and more.

The investments made by many organizations in diversity management promised to generate additional benefits beyond those associated with diversity directly. Diversity management efforts frequently led to new organizational systems and structures, as well as entry into new markets. As diversity concepts began to be applied more globally and defined more broadly, they also started adding critical new dimensions to existing organizational initiatives.

Employee reactions to the new initiatives naturally varied widely, too. Often the diversity focus created uncertainty and fear—fear of leveling the playing field and having to share it with previously under-represented groups. Others responded with apathy and annoyance: “Our plate is full already; don’t add more to it.” But many saw attention to diversity as a chance—at last!—to be heard and included. It changed their expectations for the better.

We’ve learned a thing or two from these early attempts to create change through diversity. This book builds on those lessons to help translate diversity into visible and measurable results. It is a guide for individuals and organizations to move beyond preliminary initiatives and awareness training toward systems, processes, and behaviors that embody substantive, lasting change. The book emphasizes effectiveness (doing the right things), efficiency (doing them cost effectively and well), and endurance (institutionalizing beneficial changes). The three together make for healthier places to live, learn, and work.

### Who Will Benefit from This Book?

*The Diversity Directive* will benefit anyone working to improve human and organizational performance. It is particularly written for diversity, pluralism, human resource, equity, equal opportunity, affirmative action, and education and training professionals. However, it will be equally useful for proactive workers in diversity change programs—diversity task forces, councils, boards, and audit teams, and the like. There is also helpful material here for individuals involved with diversity networks and employee resource groups.

Many of the concepts, tools, techniques, and models discussed here have been successfully applied throughout the world. They are appropriate—as is this book—for businesses, civic organizations, government agencies, and educational institutions. From them, readers will gain a practical and research-based understanding of diversity work. They will understand how to diagnose individuals and organizations, as well as how to specify appropriate healing actions at each stage of the change process. Additionally, they will be able to point out specific and tangible benefits that flow to individuals and organizations from well-done diversity work.

## How to Use This Book

*The Diversity Directive* can be skimmed quickly by reading the summaries at the end of each chapter. These summaries provide an overview of the whole in one short reading. When more detail is needed, readers can go to the sections of interest within each chapter, as summarized below and further outlined in the Table of Contents. Where necessary, redundancies in the text allow readers to fully comprehend a particular chapter or section without having to refer to earlier sections.

## What Each Chapter Offers

### Chapter 1: Rationales for Diversity Change

Presents the case for diversity work. Specifies and documents the outcomes and benefits for individuals, groups, and organizations.

### Chapter 2: Diversity Defined

Provides state-of-the-art working definitions of diversity from real organizations. Examines key related concepts such as similarities and differences, unity without uniformity, and sameness and fairness. Discusses emerging diversity dimensions.

### Chapter 3: Individual and Group Development Models

Primarily for diversity professionals, this chapter presents major individual and group development models that professionals use and delineates their applications. It also offers suggestions for individual and group development processes.

### Chapter 4: Organizational Development Models

Another chapter intended primarily for diversity professionals, Chapter 4 presents major models that professionals use, plus a generic summary model. This chapter also includes examples of diagnostic symptoms and recommended treatments.

### Chapter 5: Strategy Variations

Presents material to help custom fit a diversity approach to each organization's vision, culture, and needs. Covers issues such as self-sufficiency, top-down versus bottom-up change, pilot projects, behavior change versus attitude change, and general diversity work versus work to address specific issues.

**Chapter 6: Preparation: Factors to Consider**

Describes important ingredients often overlooked in diversity work. Also addresses obstacles to progress and ways to avoid them.

**Chapter 7: The Road to Results**

Presents tips for effective implementation, such as linking diversity with organizational objectives and focusing on closing performance gaps. Spells out quantitative and qualitative measures for tracking the diversity change process.

**Chapter 8: Conducting a Successful Diversity Audit**

Covers all major steps in a good diversity audit, from identifying rationales and winning management support to communicating results and developing action plans.

**Chapter 9: The Diversity Change Process, Step by Step**

Describes the five major phases in the diversity change process: awareness, transition, adaptation, institutionalization, and alignment.

**Chapter 10: Revitalizing Traditional Initiatives**

Covers techniques to use when initiatives stall, including enhanced awareness training, employee resource groups, human resource reviews, management practices, and more.

**Chapter 11: Diversity Competencies**

Explains elements and concepts that support diversity competence. Includes key tasks and skills of diversity professionals and self-evaluation questions.

# **A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S**

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# 1

## CHAPTER

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# Rationales for Diversity Change

**D**iversity work for individuals involves what we know, how we act, and how we feel—head, hand, and heart. If we focus on any two of these three, the third is consistently likely to follow.

Diversity change begins in the head as we learn more about people who are different from us. It continues as a process of modifying behavior—the “hand”—to become more effective in our interactions with people who reflect different cultures, speak different languages, communicate with different styles, or bring different experiences to their interactions with us. Third, diversity change involves emotional growth in the heart, as we develop authentic relationships with people who are different.

Diversity change also means that as learning and growing individuals we will move through several developmental stages as we confront each significant pluralism issue. The development involves movement from a negative or neutral view of different others to acceptance and respect and, ultimately, to a view that positively values the difference of the person with whom we interact.<sup>1</sup> At that point we grasp group and individual differences without falling into the trap of stereotypes.

Individuals working in organizations where pluralism is effective experience an enhanced quality of life. Taylor Cox sums up the factors that improve performance in a climate that values diversity as “equal-opportunity motivation to contribute.”<sup>2</sup> “Equal opportunity” does not mean that benefits are limited to groups usually named in equal-opportunity policies. Everyone shares in a better quality of life when inclusive diversity change takes place. And, as documented later in this chapter, senior managers often find that both their leadership skills and their organizations improve after they engage in personal diversity work.

## WHAT DIVERSITY MEANS FOR GROUPS

When groups include diverse perspectives and value that diversity, a number of desirable outcomes occur. Diversity provides immediate access to a larger pool of knowledge, skills, and abilities as the group works to accomplish its goals and objectives. If the climate values pluralism, then synergy is possible. Indeed, synergy is possible *only* when diversity is present and welcomed. Then, differences among individual coworkers can combine to produce positive, documentable outcomes that could not occur if everyone were the same.

The converse is true, too: In the absence of diversity, blunders are likely to occur and opportunities will be missed that a dose of difference in the group could have prevented. News media and marketing literature are full of embarrassing and costly examples, some of which now follow:

- General Motors (GM) had difficulty selling its Nova car in Spanish-speaking countries. “No va” means “no go” in Spanish. Had even one employee who knew Spanish and Spanish culture been present to provide guidance, GM could have saved a great deal of money.
- Non-kosher cheeseburgers served in Israel by McDonald’s restaurants caused a fair amount of protest and a large loss of sales.
- The team that marketed Gerber baby food in Africa made the picture on the label a black-skinned baby, yet sales in Africa were very few. Customers there expected labels that pictured the product, not the consumer. Gerber’s losses were substantial.<sup>3</sup>



However, there are numerous examples of successes brought about by diversity-smart corporations, as well.

- Kentucky Fried Chicken was successful in Israel with kosher chicken.
- Old El Paso's Mexican product line has been number one in its category for years.
- United Airlines experienced an increase in Spanish-speaking travelers when it installed a Spanish-speaking telephone reservation line.
- Avon Products saw significant revenue growth after it hired African-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American sales and marketing professionals.
- The Pillsbury Co. and Kraft-General Foods both reported increased access to African-American and Hispanic-American markets after hiring marketing and related professionals from more diverse backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond these numerous news stories and anecdotes is research-based evidence of the benefits brought by diverse perspectives. Diversity professionals now are fortunate to have excellent empirical studies that show the potential and real impacts of diversity on group performance. Here we provide a short review of these findings.

Beginning in the laboratory, research by Harry Triandis at the University of Illinois 30 years ago showed that trained groups representing politically diverse perspectives outperformed equally trained homogeneous groups.<sup>5</sup> Seven years later, Robert C. Ziller reviewed the literature on small-group performance and concluded that diverse groups outperformed homogeneous groups on complex tasks.<sup>6</sup>

Research in the 1980s provided additional empirical evidence. In 1986 Nancy Adler's work on synergy showed that diverse teams are anything but average performers. Adler described several stages of team development, beginning with cultural dominance, moving to compromise, and ending with synergy. Only diverse teams achieved the highest levels of synergy. Additionally, in 1989 *Business Week* reported that investment clubs composed of women and men made more money (10.4 percent gain) than those composed of women only (9.1 percent) or men only (8.7 percent).<sup>7</sup>