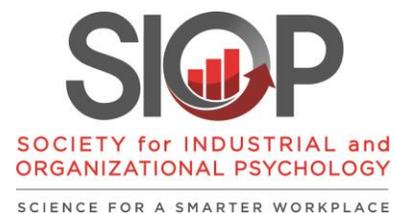


Social Science Strategies for Managing Diversity: Industrial and Organizational Opportunities to Enhance Inclusion

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More than ever before, people work together with others from different gender, racial, sexual orientation, age, religion, parental status, and ability backgrounds.

Common wisdom regarding the “business case for diversity” suggests that employee diversity is a resource that enhances organizational effectiveness. Social science findings, however, suggest that diversity can be both a challenge and an opportunity to human resource managers and organizations as a whole (Guillaume, Dawson, Woods, Sacramento, & West, 2013).

Indeed, research suggests that diversity can yield benefits in complex decision-making and innovation, but also that diversity can create incivility, conflict, and stifled team processes. The key question for scholars and practitioners alike, then, is how to maximize the positive potentials of diversity while minimizing negative outcomes.

Here, we draw from contemporary research across the social sciences to provide evidence-based recommendations for leveraging diversity. This overview considers strategies that can be enacted by individuals—both employees and managers—as well as those that can be adopted within organizations. Aligning such top-down and bottom-up efforts together may ultimately generate the most positive outcomes for people and their organizations (Ruggs, Martinez, & Hebl, 2011).

What Can Individuals Do to Realize the Benefits of Diversity?

The challenges that emerge when people from different backgrounds interact can be understood from the perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974). Social identity theory suggests that people understand and value themselves in relation to the social groups of which they are a part. These social groupings spur preferences for similar others and disfavoring of people from other social groups. In simple terms, we like people from our own group more than people from other groups. This can lead to dysfunctional behavior such as incivility, biased decision-making, and ineffective group processes. Employees and managers, however, can disrupt these processes and enable positive interpersonal dynamics in several ways.

Employees

We present two individual-level strategies that facilitate inclusion and the benefits of diversity: psychosocial support and confrontation. Psychosocial support involves listening to and reflecting understanding of the concerns of others. This seemingly simple set of behaviors is incredibly powerful. Indeed, co-worker support is one of the strongest predictors of the attitudes of stigmatized individuals (Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008). More generally, perceived organizational support—the extent to which people feel that their organizations genuinely care about them—is strongly linked with

What can individuals do?

Employees

- Provide support (listen)
- Confront bias (intervene)

Managers

- Beware own bias blind spots
- Question assumptions
- Be role models of inclusion

an extensive number of organizationally-relevant outcomes including job satisfaction, retention and performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Perhaps this is why a panel of chief diversity officers from Fortune 500 companies identified “listening” as fundamental to cultural competence in a session on “The Power of Words” at the Academy of Management Conference in 2014.

People can engage in active support by confronting bias when it emerges in their work. This is a difficult task since (a), it is difficult to detect subtle bias (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2013), (b), confrontation may feel like conflict, and (c), people are generally hesitant to intervene and instead go along to get along (Nelson, Dunn, & Pardies, 2011). Despite these challenges, people who are not personally the targets of prejudice may be in the best position to change the biased behaviors of others. A clever experimental study showed that challenges to a white participant’s mildly discriminatory statement were more effective when enacted by another white person than when the same thing was said by a black person (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). Ally confrontation may be particularly important to support people whose identities are not directly observable—when people can conceal or hide their devalued identity (e.g., sexual orientation minorities, religious minorities), they may be hesitant to respond to prejudice because it risks “outing” themselves in unfriendly environments. Managers, too, can act as supportive allies for people from underrepresented groups.

Managers

One of the most important things that managers can do is to not be part of the problem. This is, of course, harder than it sounds. Stereotypes can emerge automatically and outside of conscious awareness. Evidence suggests that people uniformly believe that others are more prejudiced than they are personally, a statistical impossibility—that is, we have blind spots to our own biases (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). In addition, stereotypes are likely to impact behavior when people are occupied by cognitively demanding tasks, a common circumstance for managers (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002). It is crucial, then, for managers to recognize that their own behaviors may not always match their egalitarian values. This discrepancy can be overcome through a process that involves: (1), noticing that there was a problem, (2), experiencing affective consequences (such as guilt or self-criticism) and (3), reflecting on the behavior that triggered them (Monteith, Mark, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010). Regret about past unsupportive behavior can actually be translated into positive future behavior.

Given this potential for change, what kinds of behaviors should managers try to notice in themselves and others? In a range of employment decisions, it boils down to questioning assumptions. Stereotypes are essentially assumptions about people based on the groups to which they belong. As an example, managers might assume that a mother with young children would not want to take on an assignment that required substantial travel (King, Botsford, Hebl, Kazama, Dawson, & Perkins, 2012). As another example, a manager might assume that people from different cultures feel equally

comfortable speaking up in meetings or advertising their personal successes. These kinds of assumptions can underlie decisions that ultimately feed into who gets the next promotion or raise. Thus, it is critical to base decisions on measurable outcomes and to directly question the factors that might inadvertently influence decision-making by asking, "What assumptions am I making in this decision?"

Beyond these kinds of decisions, managers also have the opportunity to attend more carefully to interpersonal dynamics of the groups they lead. Social network scholars, who study the frequency and types of communication patterns that emerge in organizations, show that people from underrepresented groups are meaningfully marginalized in social network structures (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). In other words, women and minorities are literally left out of conversations with upper management. Moreover, evidence suggests that even when people from underrepresented groups are in the conversation, their contributions are overlooked, downplayed or attributed to others in their group (Heilman & Haynes, 2005). A quintessential example of this is when a woman's idea is dismissed only to be applauded later when suggested by a man. Managers who pay attention to these patterns can actively work toward making sure everyone is at the table, all voices are heard, and that credit goes where it is due. In making these changes, managers can serve as role models for their followers and help to build inclusive norms.

What Can Organizations Do to Manage Diversity?

Building upon the ways in which individuals and managers can leverage the benefits of diversity, we now focus on organizational strategies for successful diversity management. Although organizational- and individual-level strategies are distinct, they can also be mutually reinforcing. For example, individual phenomena, such as perceptions of supervisors, can have bottom-up influences on organizational phenomena, such as climate. Specifically, the behaviors of one's immediate manager are regarded as key aspects of one's perceptions of the work environment (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Further, an employee's interpretation of the work environment may translate into their perceptions of the organization's climate or culture (Kozlowski & Farr, 1988). Indeed, these climate perceptions are critical for diversity management, with research demonstrating that diversity can have a positive impact on an organization's bottom line in climates that are supportive of diversity (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009)—that is, when employees possess "shared perceptions that an employer utilizes fair

What can organizations do?

Hiring

- Job-related measurement
- Consider full range of competencies
- Address stereotype threat

Diversity Training

- Include multiple rather than single group focus
- Use multiple learning techniques
- Awareness and behavioral goals
- Integrate into larger strategic diversity initiatives

Performance Management

- Provide more information
- Increase time
- Increase accountability

personnel practices and socially integrates underrepresented employees into the work environment” (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2008; p. 350).

Top-down (or trickle-down; Weiss, 1977) processes may also influence the behaviors of one’s immediate managers, such that they model the behaviors of their supervisors and/or executive level management behavior. Together, this research provides a simple, yet essential conclusion – top and middle management support and dedication to diversity initiatives are critical to creating inclusion (Rynes & Rosen, 1995). These leaders have an opportunity to be diversity champions and to take proactive measures to ensure that their organization’s hiring and training processes and procedures are fair and supportive of diversity.

Hiring

Practitioners often face the difficult challenge of striking a balance between ensuring that the tests and procedures used to evaluate applicants are strongly related to job performance and avoid adverse impact (Ployhart & Holtz, 2008). Fortunately, there are a few approaches that can be taken to thwart this diversity-validity dilemma. It is important to note that each of these approaches has critics, and that eliminating adverse impact has been called an unattainable “holy grail” (Arthur, Doverspike, Barrett, & Miguel, 2013). Nevertheless, opportunities for reducing adverse impact should be considered when they can maintain or enhance validity. We discuss three potentially preventative strategies: (1), focusing on job-related measurements, (2), expanding upon skills measured, and (3), alleviating nervousness or stress that candidates may experience during applications

The first strategy – developing a job-related measurement approach – involves creating a test with a format that provides a more realistic representation of on-the-job performance than traditional test media. For example, a video-based test may give a more realistic preview of a job than a multiple choice test. This strategy may help to reduce adverse impact, especially if the reading or writing requirements of the test are unnecessarily high for a given job. If a video-based test demonstrates greater equivalence to a job than a multiple choice test, the video-based test would be a preferable instrument to evaluate job candidacy (Pulakos & Schmitt, 1996).

A second strategy used to enhance diversity without compromising the functionality of hiring is to evaluate applicants based on their scores on a combination of tests. These tests should include those that are more predictive of job performance, but might hinder diversity (e.g., cognitive tests) as well as those that are less predictive, albeit still predictive, of job performance, but will not adversely impact diversity (e.g., personality tests). In addition to achieving diversity, this strategy has the benefit of improving the collective predictive power of the tests used to hire candidates over and above using solely cognitive measures (Sackett, Schmitt, Ellingson, & Kabin, 2001). In other words, assessing a full range of competencies relevant to the job can reduce overall subgroup differences (Ployhart & Holtz, 2008).

Now, we turn our attention to a third organizational level strategy that may be used by practitioners to ensure that candidates are able to perform under the best conditions possible, with the goal of obtaining the most accurate information about their abilities. Over the past two decades, an abundant body of research has been

conducted on stereotype threat – the concern that one’s behaviors will be perceived as fulfilling a negative stereotype about one’s group (Nguyen, & Ryan, 2008). These empirical studies examined how negative stereotypes may impede outcomes, such as performance, in a stereotype-relevant domain (Schmader & Johns, 2003).

For example, one study found women who were primed with the stereotype that men perform better in math than women performed significantly worse than women who were not primed (Gresky, Eyek, Lord, & McIntyre, 2005). It should be noted that several hiring simulation experiments failed to find evidence for a stereotype threat effect (McFarland, Lev-Arey, & Ziegert, 2003), suggesting that the more realistic nature of these studies transfer concerns toward performance and away from worries about stereotyping (Sackett, 2003; Sackett & Ryan, 2012). Nevertheless, the potential for stereotype threat to influence performance in application testing remains an area of concern for HR professionals.

Given that stereotype threat may account for some detriments in performance among women and racial/ethnic minorities, what, if anything, can practitioners do about it? Luckily, a burgeoning body of literature has focused on creating and assessing stereotype threat interventions, with research suggesting that interventions should be tailored to specific types of stereotype threat (Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005).

Specifically, interventions that provide access to a positive group role model have been found to be effective in reducing threat triggered by a concern that one’s behaviors will reflect negatively on one’s group (Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009).

Conversely, when the concern is focused on how one's actions may be seen as a reflection of one's own stereotypic abilities, thinking about important qualities outside of the stereotyped area may reduce the threat (Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007). Taken together, simple modifications to the selection process – such as presenting a successful exemplar of a female or minority employee or having applicants write about an important value unrelated to the stereotyped domain — can help to ward off these threats and help to level the playing field for all candidates.

Training

Once an organization has made efforts to create fair and equitable hiring processes, the focus may be shifted to ensure that employees possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to effectively collaborate with diverse others, and this goal may be accomplished through diversity training (Bezruova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). Although there remains a dearth of empirical evidence to support any set of diversity training “best practices,” we summarize several guiding principles that have emerged from the literature.

First, content that concentrates on inclusion and focuses on multiple groups is preferable to group-specific (e.g., ethnicity) training as it prevents the potential for backlash – groups that are not the focus of the training may inadvertently feel guilty, overly sensitive or potentially offended by the training (Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quinones, 2003). Second, course instruction that uses multiple techniques (e.g., lectures, role playing, interactive exercises) is described more positively in the literature than training using only one learning method (e.g., all lecture). Specifically, learning

necessitates the balance between different learning styles – feeling, thinking, acting, and reflecting – which may be accomplished with various learning modes (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Third, coupling awareness-focused training with behavioral training may be more successful than awareness or attitudinal training alone, especially if the goal of the diversity program is behavioral change (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2002). Finally, research suggests that integrating training into an overarching diversity initiative may be preferable to launching a stand-alone training, as it communicates a message of organizational support for diversity, which may help to shift attitudes toward diversity (Curtis, Dreachslin, & Senioris, 2007). In light of this guideline, in the following section we focus on performance management as a broader diversity initiative that may be coupled with training.

Performance Management

Evidence suggests that performance reviews can be subject to unconscious biases. These biases result in part because the employee in question may not meet stereotypic expectations of what a successful incumbent should be like (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). For example, women tend to be evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts in male-dominated or stereotypically male roles (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Moreover, bias in the delivery of performance feedback can further perpetuate inequalities. Some evidence suggests that women get less negative feedback than men, making it harder for women to improve areas of relative weakness (King et al., 2012). Bias in performance management systems should not be overlooked as they may have a meaningful, harmful impact on salary and career development.

Considering the potential for the harmful effects of such bias, practitioners may wonder how they can reduce this issue. Opportunely, research conducted over the past couple of decades has examined several interventions to diminish bias in performance evaluation, including (1), providing raters with more performance-related information (thus reducing ambiguity), (2), allowing for more uninterrupted time to make judgments, and (3), creating greater accountability (Powell & Butterfield, 2002; Arthur & Doverspike, 2005).

Conclusion

The evidence summarized briefly here demonstrates that employees, leaders and organizations have a genuine opportunity to build inclusive and diverse organizations. These efforts are not only possible, but in fact critical, from both business and societal perspectives. That is, it is in the interest of equality and organizational effectiveness that scholars and practitioners build and implement scientific findings regarding diversity management.

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