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Critical Reflection: 2

Managing Diversity

Social Welfare 843: Strengthening Staff Performance in a Diverse Workplace

February 9, 2006

The concept of an inclusive workplace has gained attention in recent years due to the ever-changing composition of the work force and growing social pressures demanding that

workplaces and organizations be diverse. In an increasingly multicultural climate, scholars and businessmen alike, have sought to distinguish between superficial attempts at “the inclusive workplace” and meaningful strategies which foster diversity beyond the narrow interpretation of the past. Today, the concept of diversity and inclusion has shifted from a typically micro-focus stressing internal procedure, to a macro-focus emphasizing the affect of organizational practices on the community at large. This paper will utilize three readings *Understanding the impact of human resource diversity practices on firm performance* (2001), *The inclusive workplace: An ecosystems approach to diversity management* (2000), and *Searching for common threads: Understanding the multiple effects of diversity in organizational groups* (1996), to examine the varying approaches and implications to workplace diversity and management. [Good intro.](#)

*Understanding the multiple effects of diversity in organizational groups*

While cultural diversity has typically been associated with race and ethnicity, diversity has taken on a broader meaning to include the socio-cultural experiences of different genders, social classes, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, ages, as well as varying physical and mental abilities (NASW, 2001). Therefore, in thinking about diversity, it is helpful to consider the distinction between diversity based upon observable characteristics, such as gender or ethnicity, and underlying attributes such as level of education or values (Milliken & Martins, 1996). As these varying types of diversity impact group composition, recent research on diversity has focused on how it affects organizational functioning. Milliken & Martin (1996) suggest that diversity among colleagues--in all its forms--may affect the probability of employee turnover, cognitive outcomes such as the creativity of solutions, and general employee performance. Additionally, this research indicates that the effects of diversity upon groups, whether implicit or explicit, can result in affective, cognitive, symbolic and communication-related consequences,

which explains why individuals with more similar attributes and/or backgrounds tend to identify with one another. However, important findings in this area also reveal that these consequences seem to subside after a certain level of behavioral integration is reached. Moreover, positive outcomes of diversity such as innovation, creativity, and a greater range of perspectives, can outweigh the initial organizational pitfalls (Milliken & Martins, 1996). [Good.](#)

The diversity configuration within an organizational structure largely depends upon a combination of organizational culture and values. This is especially true when gauging an organization's sense of social responsibility to the wider community. While the concept of corporate social responsibility mirrors some of the value-driven practices of social welfare agencies, in the corporate world, this is still a fairly new phenomenon. Companies who value creativity and innovation may be more likely to focus on diversity initiatives than those concerned with efficiency alone. In contrast to this sort of diversity-oriented culture, which views diversity as a fundamental part of organizational culture, other organizations may only consider diversity out of legal necessity to avoid legal or social consequence. Further, firms that place more value on production may see little value in the enhanced creativity and innovative processes diversity promotes. While these organizational systems are likely to employ some sort of strategies to attract diverse staff, they are also likely to expect minority employees to assimilate to the norms of the majority. Distinguishing between superficial and significant strategies is crucial in determining the role diversity actually plays in an organization (Richard & Johnson, 1999). Meaningful diversity orientation strategies include more than one or two activities that incorporate the concept of diversity. True diversity management requires an unambiguous policy structure that encourages diversity throughout all facets of an organization.

[Excellent.](#)

*An ecosystems approach to diversity management*

Michal Barak (2000) places an interesting spin on the existing diversity discourse relevant to social work practice on micro, mezzo and macro levels. Barak (2000) proposes an ecosystems approach to diversity management which would expand organizational diversity to include external processes, such as participating in community initiatives, promoting the rights and needs of the disadvantaged, and collaborating across cultural and national lines. Given that this ecosystems approach invokes core social work values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, Barak argues that social workers have a professional responsibility to develop and foster inclusion as it relates to individuals, organizations, the community, and society at large. According to Barak, through a practice-based approach to diversity, social workers can leverage their professional skills and knowledge to collaborate with individuals, groups, and organizations. Social workers can help connect companies with community action groups and assist in identifying community needs. Therefore, Barak proposes that social workers are not only well positioned to help organizations with internal initiatives such as diversity training, but can be key players in helping to implement external diversity efforts as well (Barak, 2000). [Good.](#)

*Diversity Orientation at Children's Mercy Hospital and Clinics*

In thinking about different types of diversity and an organization's social responsibility to the wider community, Children's Mercy Hospital and Clinics makes a meaningful effort to foster diversity practices. In correlation with the hospital's commitment to serve the physical, emotional, financial, social and spiritual needs of patients and their families, more than 60 social workers in the Social Work and Community Services Department work in various capacities helping children and families to help themselves (Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, 2004).

Recognizing the need for continual vigilance as we pursue improvements in our approach to cultural diversity and cultural competence, the social work department has aided in initiating a strategic effort to ensure diversity in all facets of the organization and within the community. The Social Work Department utilizes an ecosystems approach as described in Barak's article, by recognizing that our practice responsibilities move beyond simply providing internal services. In an effort to support the families in the neighborhoods and communities in which they live, the Hospital and Social Work Department recognizes the importance of being involved with outside agencies, such as schools, the court system, as well as other social welfare agencies. [Good.](#)

### *Conclusion*

The extent to which organizations create inclusive workplaces varies with pre-established organizational values. Some may view diversity as a threat, while others consider it an asset. As expressed in each article, a primary obstacle to initiating and implementing diversity initiatives, are economic pressures and potential costs to companies in the short run. Nevertheless, as organizations operate more frequently in multicultural and multinational contexts, understanding how diversity affects individual, organizations, communities and society will be of growing importance (Millken & Martins, 1996). Guided by professional expectations that address ethics and values, self-awareness, and cross-cultural knowledge, social workers can help change existing operational barriers and advocate for diverse employment systems. Lastly, by acting as liaisons between organizations and the community social workers can assist companies in identifying and responding to both individual and community needs. [Good.](#)

### References

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You did an outstanding job on this reflection paper. You captured the essence of the articles and applied the points to your field placement. Good work! Grade = 100