

In the column, *A Matter of Difference*, Martin N. Davidson and Bernardo M. Ferdman address diversity and inclusion as they apply to organizations as a whole. Their hope was to inform, stimulate, and sometimes provoke the reader to think critically about diversity, how it affects us, and what we can do about and with it.

For example, in “Diversity and Inclusion: What Difference Does It Make?” the authors discuss engaging in dialogue about diversity within an organization. This kind of powerful discourse pervades modern organizations in the United States, and increasingly in other parts of the world. Even though many people talk about diversity as a social advancement, as a movement or principle associated with greater equality and fairness, far too often diversity becomes associated with scarce resources and competition over what is valued. Some person or some group is trying to gain something while some other person in some other group is trying to protect something. This is the nexus at which so many attempts to generate and nurture diversity have failed. Yet in the midst of this and other challenges, the imperative of dealing with our differences in new and creative ways remains.

In “Inclusion: What Can I and My Organization Do About It?” the authors describe inclusion and make a case that it is important to organizational effectiveness. One definition of inclusion is individuals’ access to information and resources, work group involvement, and ability to influence decision making. The authors believe that inclusion happens at two levels—the individual and the organizational. Interpersonally and in groups, being able to foster and engage in true dialogue and to understand and productively work through conflicts are critical skills. Developing inclusion is everyone’s responsibility; we each need to look inward at our own role in and contribution to the

situations in which we find ourselves. If we expect inclusion, we must learn to provide it by modeling the necessary behaviors for those around us.

Ferdman and Davidson discuss limits and boundaries to inclusion in “Drawing the Line: Are Some Differences Too Different?” They begin by looking at the September 11 attacks on the United States and the subsequent profiling of Arabs. Unfortunately, we are prone, especially under conditions of threat, to become simplistic and rigid in our thinking about difference. Categorical information about group memberships is often used as a way to understand situations. Thus our attention to differences can, on the one hand, lead to exclusion, designating certain people and groups as so different that they are totally unacceptable and alien. Alternatively, attending to and allowing for differences can also make us stronger by providing us more resources and perspectives. There is strength in the differences, but only if we are willing to change and be changed, particularly in terms of our hold on the boundaries.

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