

It is estimated that three out of every four *Fortune* 500 companies have a formal diversity program in place, and over half of those companies have staff members dedicated to diversity issues. Many of these initiatives were generated as responses to episodes of discrimination and injustice in the organization. In “**The Value of Being Included: An Examination of Diversity Change Initiatives in Organizations**,” Martin N. Davidson explores what prevents diversity change initiatives from having maximal effectiveness by examining what motivates most organizations to undertake initiatives, and by examining how those initiatives are implemented. He then discusses how barriers to effectiveness may be overcome.

One motivation for undertaking diversity change initiatives is to gain competitive advantage; some factors critical to making the business case include increasingly diverse customers and markets, global diversity, and anticipated changes in workforce demographics. Davidson suggests some alternative explanations for why corporations engage in diversity change, such as crisis management, moral reasons, or a business rationale.

Among the barriers to effective implementation of diversity change initiatives are oppression and privilege in the organization. Oppression is the use of pervasive societal attitudes, institutions, and policies to maintain an unjust exercise of authority or power over persons or groups of persons; privilege means the advantage that accrues to a person by virtue of his or her appearance or station. This would include, for example, systems such as downsizing policies that lay off individuals with the least seniority, even though

most of the women in the organization are the least tenured people. These dynamics, among others, combine to diminish the impact of diversity change initiatives.

Davidson explores how diversity in organizations can be more effectively leveraged. He finds that to overcome the barriers that diminish the power of diversity change efforts, initiatives must be grounded conceptually and tactically in the principle of inclusion. Managers and leaders routinely use a variety of techniques, such as encouraging informal social interaction and creating and maintaining strong organizational cultures, to help people feel a part of the whole organization. If diversity change initiatives address ways of building structural and psychological inclusiveness for organizational members, they are more likely to be successful.

Diversity change initiatives will continue to be limited in their effectiveness until an inclusive perspective that incorporates the critical needs for the disenfranchised members and the privileged members in the organization is developed. Approaches that encourage both inclusive thinking and action are the most promising paths to effective diversity change initiatives. When implemented effectively, valuing difference initiatives motivates every individual within the organization to perform more effectively in the service of the goals of the organization, whether that individual is from a traditionally disenfranchised group or from a traditionally privileged group.

To request a copy of the full research paper, please contact Martin at <http://www.leveragingdifference.com/contact/>.