VALUING OUR DIFFERENCES

How to Manage a Culturally Diverse Work Force

BY ROBERT L. VENINGA, PhD

Managing a culturally diverse work force will present immense challenges in the years ahead. Here is a snapshot of the U.S. work force in the year 2000:

• Only about 15 percent of new workers are white men.

• Of new entrants to the work force, 29 percent are minorities, including African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics.

• A large percentage of the work force is composed of immigrants. Each year 600,000 legal and illegal immigrants—two-thirds of all immigrants—enter the United States.

• Two-thirds of those entering the U.S. work force are women.[1]

Those who view diversity as a threat to stability will probably find themselves in conflict with those who do not share similar values. But as author Lennie Copeland states, "Those who view diversity among employees as a source of richness and strength can help bring a wide range of benefits to their organizations."[2]

How can we become aware of cultural blind spots that keep us from understanding one another? How can we create an environment in which cultural diversity is valued and not resented? And what can be done so that a simple policy change will not result in misunderstandings? This article discusses guidelines for promoting cultural diversity in contemporary healthcare organizations.

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DEVELOP STRATEGIC GOALS

To adequately prepare for the new work force, healthcare organizations must establish work force diversity goals. That is what Baxter Healthcare Corporation did.[3] First, however, 2,000 employees were asked:

• How can the company dramatically increase its visible commitment to diversity?

• How can Baxter train employees to further

Summary How can we become aware of cultural blind spots that keep us from understanding one another? To adequately prepare for the new work force, healthcare organizations must establish work force diversity goals. Of course, goals by themselves will not empower minority workers. And if goals are perceived as "window dressing," resentment builds.

Most organizations claim their hiring practices are not biased. One way to ensure that your hiring practices are unbiased is to ask important questions: *Does the ethnic makeup of our work force resemble* that of the community? If not, what can be done to strengthen our affirmative action programs?

In a multicultural work force, misunderstandings are bound to arise because human behavior is conditioned by cultural factors. One way for an organization to identify problems that are culturally based is for supervisors and subordinates to meet informally to ensure that the organization is maximizing the minority worker's talents. Climate surveys and exit interviews are two other frequently used methods.

Cultural diversity training programs can also make a difference in an organization. Some training programs help participants learn how culture influences the way we communicate. Knowledge of the cultural basis of how we interact is one factor in building bridges of understanding.

appreciate differences in gender, race, and culture?

• What must Baxter do in selecting, developing, and promoting women and minorities into executive-level positions?

The interview results were startling. Henry Arthur, vice president of distribution services for Baxter, said, "If you were a member of the traditional white male work force, everything was okay. If you weren't part of that traditional work force, everything was not okay."

On the basis of the interviews, Baxter's leaders developed four goals:

• To create an environment that attracts and promotes the best people worldwide

• To promote development of a diverse work force, with employees maximizing their production capabilities

• To build confidence and support for the learning capacity of all people

• To build an environment in which individual backgrounds and cultures are appreciated and valued

These goals, coupled with an aggressive training program, have had a positive impact. For example, the number of minorities in Baxter's Hospital Sales and Distribution Division sales force increased by 12 percent in 1992. The number of women in managerial and sales positions rose to 32 percent in that division.

Although some organizations resist setting precise quotas for minority promotions, others have had success in establishing broad goals. Xerox, for example, identifies "Pivotal Jobs" and makes certain that women and minorities have an opportunity to fill them.[4]

Goals can be as simple as providing English classes for immigrants. For example, sometimes minority workers need informal coaching. In other instances, a corporation needs to offer the opportunity for minority workers to complete their education at a community college or a university graduate school. Whatever the strategy, the intent should be to give workers the tools to achieve success. Of course, goals by themselves will not empower minority workers. And if goals
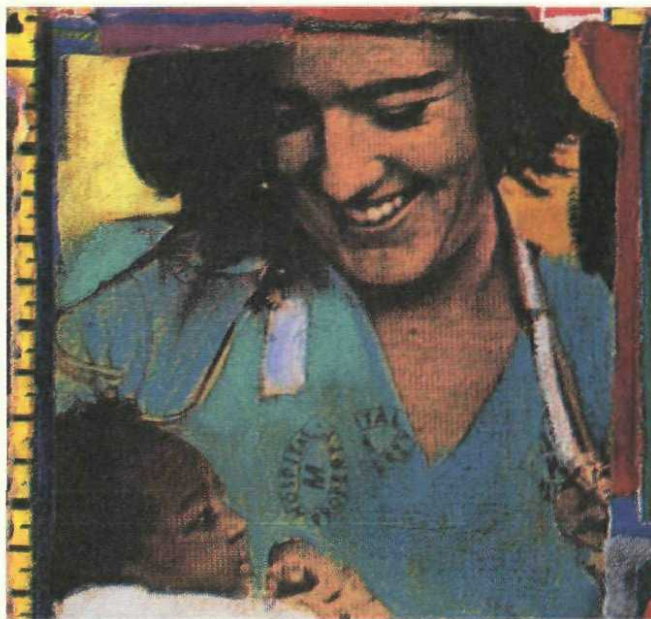
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are perceived as "window dressing," resentment builds. Nevertheless, carefully crafted goals:

• Signal to employees that an organization's leaders care about diversity

• Provide managers direction to address minority workers' special problems

• Provide an explicit statement that guides hiring and promotion practices

REVIEW HIRING PRACTICES

Most organizations claim that their hiring practices are not biased. However, one major study revealed that among similar job applicants, whites were three times more likely to be favored than blacks.[5]

What can you do to ensure that your hiring practices are unbiased? Here are some suggestions:

• Ask important questions: Does the ethnic makeup of our work force resemble that of the community? If not, what can be done to strengthen our affirmative action program?

• Ensure that interviewers will be able to understand applicants who prefer to speak their native language.

• If your organization interviews a minority applicant who turns out to be inappropriate for the position, make sure your reasons for not hiring the person are defensible.

• If your organization is not attracting as many minority applicants as it should, try another tactic. Newspaper and radio advertisements may show limited success when recruiting minority employees. Instead, ask minority employees to help locate such applicants. Or consider opening an employment office or using one already located in a minority community. Another way to locate talented minorities is to contact local religious or other not-for-profit organizations whose mission is to serve immigrants. Sometimes, however, a wider net should be cast. For example, National Medical Enterprises initiated discussions with the Chinese government to bring workers to the United States. After nine months of negotiations, interrupted by the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, 25 Chinese came to work in the corporation's Boston nursing homes. The arrangement has been so beneficial that

MANAGERS' ROLE IN WORK FORCE DIVERSITY

- Develop a departmental mission statement indicating that cultural diversity is valued.
- Make clear that racist or sexist comments will not be tolerated.
- Conduct exit interviews with minority workers asking how working conditions could be improved.
- Take part in cultural diversity training programs with members of your staff; discuss with staff members the outcomes of the training.
- Publicly state your commitment to cultural diversity.

National Medical Enterprises is planning on hiring 35 more Chinese.[6]

IDENTIFY AND TRY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

In a multicultural work force, misunderstandings are bound to arise because human behavior is conditioned by cultural factors. For example, brainstorming (encouraging employees to share and challenge controversial ideas) is often exhilarating to American workers, but Asian employees often have difficulty understanding a public display of emotions. In Asian countries, public meetings are usually rituals to demonstrate consensus; questioning is done beforehand in private meetings.

How can an organization identify problems that are culturally based? One way is for supervisors and subordinates to meet informally to ensure that the organization is maximizing the minority worker's talents.

Climate surveys and exit interviews are two other frequently used methods. If surveys and exit interviews indicate cultural conflicts, an organization's leaders should ask minority employees how these conflicts can be resolved.

Climate Surveys Climate surveys are designed to retrieve information on specific topics by asking a series of questions. Here are four nursing staff questions suggested by Norma Jean Schmieding, associate professor of nursing at the University of Rhode Island:

- Is upward mobility difficult for minority nurses?
- What is the institution's commitment to minority nurses?
- How are minorities represented in the hospital's publications?
- Does the organization have channels, structures, and human resources that might be used to address these concerns?[7]

In one hospital, respondents expressed concerns about the visibility and accurate portrayal of minorities in the hospital's media. They noted that Martin Luther King's birthday had not been observed, but the hospital gave widespread publicity to a less-significant athletic event.[8]

Climate surveys can sometimes yield important data. Procter & Gamble asked employees how long it took new hires to feel "joined-up" with the company. The answers varied by race and gender. White men acclimated most quickly, whereas black women took the longest to feel at home. As a result of the survey, the company initiated an orientation program to help welcome new employees. Procter & Gamble also paired 23 minority managers with a senior employee of their choice so that the minority managers could receive helpful advice and feedback. The result? Minority turnover decreased considerably.[9]

Exit Interviews A second method for pinpointing conflicts is an exit interview, conducted shortly before an individual terminates employment. When Johnson Wax became alarmed by the high rate of minority turnover in its organizations, the company used exit interviews to learn why. The answers were surprising. Johnson Wax executives thought they would hear complaints about harassment, discrimination, and lack of adequate day care. Instead, they uncovered frustrations over slow career progress, unfulfilling assignments, and a general feeling that minorities could not fit in.

DEVELOP INNOVATIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Climate surveys and exit interviews provide information that can be used in training programs, but do cultural diversity training programs *really* make a difference? Are the expenses worth the investment? Specific data on the effectiveness of cultural diversity training are difficult to find. Nevertheless, a study of 75 Canadian consultants demonstrated that people exposed to even the most rudimentary forms of training on cultural diversity are significantly more likely to recognize the impact of cultural diversity on work behavior. Furthermore, they are able to identify the potential benefits of cultural diversity in the workplace.[10]

Some training programs help participants learn how culture influences the way we communicate. For example, the "Personal Profile System," a program developed by Performax Systems

> When Johnson Wax became alarmed by high minority turnover, it used exit interviews to learn why.

International, helps participants understand four patterns of behavior—dominating, influencing, cautious, and steady—and how they are related to one's culture.[11] Of course, one should not assume that all employees from a specific culture communicate in a similar way, for that perpetuates stereotypes. But knowledge of the cultural basis of how we interact is one factor in building bridges of understanding. According to the Performax program:

• Employees exhibiting dominating behavior value action more than deliberation, reason more than intuition, and managing more than asking. They can be logical, rational, and quick learners.

• Employees exhibiting influencing behavior enjoy persuading others to accept their point of view and will seek to shape others' opinions. Influencers enjoy being with others and take delight when goals have been achieved. Although they work well in groups, they will work conscientiously on solitary tasks.

• Employees exhibiting cautious behavior are thoughtful. They value the opinions of others, think before acting, and frequently check with people they respect. They work hard and will put in considerable effort in reaching organizational goals.

• Employees exhibiting steady behavior are persistent, dedicated, and loyal. They have a strong desire to overcome obstacles, seldom complain, and once committed to a goal will do everything possible to achieve it.

Analyzing the cultural basis of communication will be new to many employees. Surveys reveal that a vast majority of managers in American corporations and public agencies have had *no* contact with members of different ethnic groups before adulthood. The reason? Many had attended somewhat or completely segregated schools and lived in racially unmixed neighborhoods, unexposed to people different from themselves.[12] Some training programs therefore discuss differences in two value orientations—individualism and collectivism.

Individualism   At the heart of individualism is self-interest—taking action to better one's status. The underpinnings of individualism are hard work, persistence, and self-discipline. The tools of individualism are logic, rational thinking, and problem solving.

Those who embrace individualism are driven, results-oriented employees. They bring discipline to the workplace. If committed to organizational goals, individualists work hard, especially when

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adequately rewarded.

Individualism has a downside, however. "In early days," states Robert N. Bellah, sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley, "the individualism in America was one that also honored community values. Today we have an ideology of individualism that simply encourages people to maximize personal advantage. This leads to a consumer politics in which 'What's in it for me?' is all that matters, while considerations of the common good are increasingly irrelevant."[13]

The five countries most strongly associated with individualism are the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands.

Collectivism   Collectivists are loyal to family, work groups, and tribes. They have confidence in their own ideas, yet rely heavily on others to validate self-worth. In addition, they have deep feeling of being connected to others. No one will support a team-building project more than those with a collectivist orientation. They value meetings, appreciate group rewards, and work hard to achieve group goals.

Yet collectivism often generates friction between ethnic groups. After reviewing more than 100 scientific studies, Harry C. Triandis, a University of Illinois psychologist, states, "While collectivists are very nice to those who are members of their own groups, they can be very nasty, competitive, and uncooperative towards those who belong to other groups. There is an unquestioned obedience to one's own group and even a willingness to fight and die for it, and distrust of those in other groups."[14]

The top five countries that reflect the spirit of collectivism are Venezuela, Columbia, Pakistan, Peru, and Taiwan.

COMMITMENT FROM THE TOP

Successful diversity programs need a strong commitment from top managers. As noted in a recent issue of *Harvard Business Review*, cultural diversity "is no longer simply a question of common decency. It is a question of business survival."[15]

Still, many Americans wonder whether immigrants take U.S. citizens' employment opportunities. Not necessarily. As *Business Week* notes, "Economists have shown that immigrants may not steal employment away from native-born workers. Instead, in the short run they mainly compete with slightly earlier arrivals from the

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same region. And in the long run the new immigrants may help create as many jobs as they fill, bringing skills and initiative to the U.S."[16]   □

NOTES

1. "Managing Diversity," *Working Age*, AARP Newsletter Special Issue, 1990, p. 1.
2. Lennie Copeland, "Making the Most of Cultural Differences at the Workplace," *Personnel Journal*, June 1988, p. 52.
3. Lisa Harrington, "Why Managing Diversity Is So Important," *Distribution*, November 1993, p. 90.
4. "Managing Diversity," p. 3.
5. Aaron Epstein, "Blacks Still Subject to Discrimination in Hiring, Study Says," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 15, 1991, p. 3b.
6. Lennie Copeland, "Valuing Diversity, Part 2: Pioneers and Champions of Change," *Personnel Journal*, July 1988, pp. 45-46.
7. Norma Jean Schmieding, "A Novel Approach to Recruitment, Retention and Advancement of Minority Nurses in a Health Care Organization," *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1991, p. 71.
8. Schmieding, p. 72.
9. Copeland, "Valuing Diversity, Part 2," p. 3.
10. Nancy J. Adler, *International Dimension of Organizational Behavior*, Kent Publishing, Northridge, CA, 1986, pp. 77-83.
11. Audrey Edwards "The Enlightened Manager: How to Treat Your Employees Fairly," *Working Woman*, January 1991, p. 47.
    A number of games can bring cultural diversity training programs to life. Among them are "The Diversity Game," created by New York City–based Quality Educational Development, Inc., and "Diversity Bingo Advancement Strategies," Bloomington, IN. For further information, see "Games Augment Diversity Training," *Personnel Journal*, June 1993, pp. 78-82.
12. Copeland, "Valuing Diversity, Part 2," p. 3.
13. Daniel Coleman, "Individualism vs. Collectivism Is Key to Unlock Cultural Contrasts," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, January 3, 1991, p. 8E.
14. Coleman, p. 1E.
15. Abby Livingston, "The Enlightened Manager: How to Treat All Your Employees Fairly," *Working Woman*, January 1991, p. 47.
16. "Managing Diversity," p. 7.

"DOING" DIVERSITY

Each institution submits an annual plan of its objectives.

diversity, the employees of Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD, staged an educational fashion show in which participants wore costumes from their place of national origin. "The show was very popular among the employees," says Giammalvo, "not only because of the costumes' styles and colors but also because the narrator of the show provided various bits of information about each country and its culture." More recently, Holy Cross Hospital held a management retreat that focused on diversity.

MEASURING THE RESULTS
Giammalvo says it is too soon to evaluate the system's diversity program.

HCHS's leaders have coached local chief executive officers (CEOs) to work toward diversity on their boards of trustees and leadership teams, he says. Beyond that, each member institution submits an annual plan of its objectives. "Beginning this year," says Giammalvo, "each CEO has been asked to identify the specifics of his or her facility's diversity plan and decide how it will be measured. Next year, when our CEOs are evaluated, one of the criteria will be: What specifics were you able to initiate and measure in diversity?"

In addition, as part of its systemwide mission assessment and development process, HCHS will be taking a comprehensive look at diversity in the overall context of mission fulfillment.   *—Gordon Burnside*

For more information on Holy Cross Health System's diversity program, call Peter Giammalvo at 219-233-8558.

SENIORS

Future research should focus on the homebound.

Mercy and St. Charles needed to take a different communication approach with residents. The hospitals have explored ways to further incorporate the findings into their delivery systems, and the local community's cultural needs continue to influence emerging services. The hospitals have taken programs into the community. For example, they are now presenting educational programs at apartment complexes where elderly African Americans and Hispanics live.

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED
Because the sample size of this needs assessment was so small, future research on minority elderly health issues is needed. In addition, we recognize that the survey had its limitations. Namely, it did not allow for in-depth probing to learn exactly what participants meant by their responses. For example, many participants said they exercised often. But to them the term "exercise" meant going to visit a neighbor one door away.

Participants in this study were ambulatory, reported they were in good health, and sought medical care when needed. They were not representative of homebound elderly in poor health. Additional research could focus on identifying the status and needs of the homebound, inner-city, minority elderly. Healthcare institutions could use additional data to help them increasingly respond to elderly persons' needs, especially those from minority ethnic groups.   □

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