

# WORKPLACE DIVERSITY: A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

*Managing Diversity Is a Social,  
Financial, and Moral Imperative*

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To help Catholic healthcare leaders develop a vision and plan for managing diversity, the Catholic Health Association Diversity in the Workplace Task Force has compiled a resource manual, which will be published later this spring. In addition to the following paper, the manual will include lists of consultants and packaged programs, recent literature on diversity in the workplace, and excerpts from major Church documents on social justice issues.

**D**iversity in the workplace, once on the periphery of work force concerns, is now an immediate and critical issue, claiming the full attention of employers. The complex moral, social, and economic implications of workplace diversity make it morally indefensible and economically impractical for employers to disregard the issue any longer. The global econo-

my has facilitated an era in which the people of the world's nations are either competitors, customers, or partners in joint ventures. Healthcare organizations, like businesses, can ill afford to ignore cultural differences.

Cause for concern over the character of the work force emerged out of the rapidly changing demographic trends that are already apparent within American population patterns. These changes presage a workplace in the twenty-first century that will be significantly different from the present one. "By the year 2000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women will make up 47 percent of workers, and minorities and immigrants will hold 26 percent of all jobs, up from 22 percent in 1990."<sup>1</sup>

## DEFINING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Fostering workplace diversity is about building an organizational culture that embraces personal differences and encourages heterogeneous groups of

**Summary** Fostering workplace diversity is about building an organizational culture that embraces personal differences and encourages heterogeneous persons to work together toward a common end. Setting in motion the transition to a more inclusive and productive workplace is an uncommon challenge and the primary responsibility of leaders, especially in Catholic healthcare.

The origins of diversity can be found in creation itself. Not only are we united as a people of God and as members of the body of Christ, we are bound together through our shared humanity.

Three values are especially relevant to promoting diversity in the workplace: respect for human dignity, the common good, and distributive justice as participation in the common good.

Economic incentives strengthen the theological

and moral motives for developing a diverse work force. Organizations' financial success will depend ultimately on how well diversity is integrated into the organizational culture.

As a process, managing diversity enables healthcare leaders to discover new ways to develop the potential of all employees and at the same time improve performance and production. At the heart of managing diversity lies the reform of internal systems, structures, and processes. Managing diversity also requires the transformation of the organization's culture. Initiatives that are useful for setting a positive future course include conducting a cultural audit, establishing a cultural diversity task force, and putting in place a diversity "champion" who is accountable directly to the chief executive officer.

persons to work together toward a common end. However, achieving common goals in a collaborative spirit may be impossible if we fail to recast existing negative behaviors regarding individual differences. The behaviors that threaten harmony are frequently associated with gender, race, ethnicity, age, personal attributes, and sexual orientation. Although these characteristics may represent fundamental differences among people, they warrant respect and understanding because they are human attributes innate to every person. How individuals accept and understand these inborn but distinguishing human characteristics in themselves and in others greatly affects their view of themselves and their environment.

For work force diversity to be accepted as a strength, *Workforce 2000*, written by B. Johnson and Arnold H. Packer, suggests that black, white, Asian, and Hispanic men and women—including all categories of employees—need to have their differences understood and valued rather than ignored or blended into a homogeneous cultural milieu.<sup>2</sup> Assimilating differences into an indistinguishable homogenization mistakes uniformity for unity. Diversity, on the other hand, reflects the richness native to the human family. Setting in motion the transition to a more inclusive and productive workplace is an uncommon challenge and the primary responsibility of leaders, especially in Catholic healthcare.

### THEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF DIVERSITY

The origins of diversity can be found in creation itself. Everywhere about us the magnificence of God's handiwork graces nature, manifesting itself in the boundless variety of life forms. Each species' distinctiveness is appreciated both for its own unique value and for how it extends and complements the beauty of nature as a whole.

An integral part of God's creative splendor is humankind. Persons within the human community, paralleling the rich diversity found in nature, are bound together through common origin and purpose. Saint Paul aptly summarized the unity of the human community in his letter to the Ephesians: "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and parent of us all, who is over all" (Eph 4:4). By reason of our common origin in God, every person ought to approach his or her neighbor with familial respect and affection.

Not only are we united as a people of God and as members of the body of Christ, we are bound together through our shared humanity. The experience of what it means to be human transcends the diversities of origin, cultural heritage, language, and custom. Ethnic multiplicity and cultural diversity, far from limiting the expressions of human thought, activity, and feeling, give testimony to humanity's richness and illustrate the possibilities of perfecting human unity within diversity.

*Ethnic multiplicity and cultural diversity give testimony to humanity's richness and illustrate the possibilities of perfecting human unity within diversity.*



Mark Langeneckert

As daughters and sons of the one God, women and men of all races are destined through the gift of creation to return to God. The American bishops, in their document *Cultural Pluralism in the United States*, remind us of the importance of this fundamental belief: "This unity of origin and destiny must give direction to all the acts of persons and nations."<sup>3</sup> Unity of origin and destiny demonstrates how the Christian vocation, our responsibility to return to God, is communitarian in character. By design, according to "Lumen Gentium," God "willed to make persons holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge and serve God in holiness."<sup>4</sup>

**MORAL RATIONALE FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY**

The response to God's call requires that Christians live a life of integrity. To help persons implement values and effect goodness in their lives and the lives of others, the Church offers a well-developed body of social teaching. Three values are especially relevant to promoting diversity in the workplace: respect for human dignity,

the common good, and distributive justice as participation in the common good.

The dignity of each person is rooted in the fact that persons individually and as a group reflect the image of God. As a reflection of God, each human being possesses a dignity that is inviolate. Human dignity is inalienable from personhood and exists prior to the person's classification into gender, race, or culture. The dignity integral to every person bestows an inestimable worth on persons that warrants respect.

In their pastoral letter on the economy, *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. bishops point out that "human dignity can be realized and protected only in community."<sup>5</sup> Implicit in this statement is the understanding that human nature is essentially social. A person is always a person-in-community. The dignity of a person never exists in isolation from relations with the larger community.

One important way that persons participate in the life of the larger community is through the social ties developed within the workplace. Reflection on the workplace in the context of the

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interdependence of persons within community focuses on the person of the worker rather than the worker's relationship to production. Organizational cultures that promote and model respect for employees enable them to realize their human dignity, to reach their full potential, and to be productive.

Respect for the dignity of each person takes into account not only the similarities between persons but also their differences. The process of accepting differences affirms human dignity, and the growing sense of interior freedom releases new creative energies. The ability to be productive, with acceptance of one's race, age, or cultural differences, fosters self-esteem. In a transformed organizational culture, diversity manifests itself in new efficiencies, increased productivity, and product innovation.

The long-term effects of promoting workplace diversity are reciprocally beneficial to the employee and the organization. The production of goods and services has a social dimension that reaches beyond interpersonal relationships. Human need draws forth workers' creative responses, which in turn promote human progress in new and wonderful ways. The advances in medical science and disease control provide a graphic example of human ingenuity reaching beyond itself when new needs arise. Moreover, complex social structures and systems facilitate the development of social goods for global markets; in all these efforts, workers contribute to the common good and the advancement of the human community.

The common good embraces the differences of gender, race, and culture and draws on the richness of the gifts and talents of many cultures. The common good is inclusive of everyone's contributions and is realized more fully when individuals and communities work together for the good of all. When people work together, they advance both individual development and the good of the organization.

When employees contribute to the social well-being of the human family and promote human progress, they experience a sense of satisfaction. They not only accomplish their goals and tasks, but at the same time they contribute to the com-

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mon good. In contributing to the common good, employees rightfully can expect to have access to the resources and opportunities that are necessary for them to realize their God-given talents and destiny. Access to goods and services necessary to living humanely and access to opportunities that enable their growth as persons are the basic ways persons can participate in the common

good. The ability to participate and share in social goods and services is the fundamental means of protecting and promoting the dignity of each person. In this context, a basic requirement of justice is the ability to participate in the various aspects of life within the human community.

## MANAGING DIVERSITY

Economic incentives strengthen the theological and moral motives for developing a diverse workforce. The changing patient base may persuade healthcare leaders and managers to adapt to a new environment, for their organization's financial success will depend ultimately on how well diversity is integrated into the organizational culture. To sustain or enhance their viability in a multicultural marketplace, especially in light of the emphasis placed on individual choice in managed care, healthcare leaders are discovering the need to adapt to the newly emerging social and demographic realities.

Managing diversity is defined as a "comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees."<sup>6</sup> Managing diversity is a process, not a program. As a process, it enables healthcare leaders to discover new ways to develop the potential of all employees and at the same time improve performance and production. As a managerial process, it addresses the issues that may prevent the fulfillment of organizational goals.

A principle basic to managing diversity is that gender, race, and cultural heritage can no longer be ignored but are "part of a larger, even more complex picture" and that it is now a manager's responsibility to foster the acceptance, as opposed to the assimilation, of differences that are rooted in an individual's expression of human nature.<sup>7</sup>

Managing diversity is mostly about empower-

ing employees. In the past, leaders focused empowerment efforts on the personal and interpersonal dimensions of work relationships. More recently, they have shifted the emphasis to how the organization transforms its culture and structures to empower employees. The goal of organizational transformation is to enable employees to reach their full potential. The empowerment of em-

employees assumes a reciprocal process of change and adaptation between the individual employee and the organization. This process represents a fundamental change in the way organizations traditionally developed their cultures.

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND DIVERSITY**

Many leaders in industry and business who have invested a good deal of time in promoting diversity perceive the overall effort as an evolutionary social process. For them, the process began in the 1960s with the affirmative action legislation. Long-time leaders in diversity management view affirmative action as an attempt, through legal and social coercion, to change the social structures that exclude women and minorities from full participation in social and economic opportunities.

After enactment of the affirmative action legislation, when women and minorities still failed to advance in their careers, some corporate managers began to realize that more than a legal impetus was needed to provide access to equal opportunity. Retrospectively, affirmative action came to be understood as the catalyst for a new phase in a long-term process of managing diversity. Affirmative action and its emphasis on limited structural change were complemented by initiatives that focused on valuing differences.

"Valuing differences" programs continue to encourage respect for diversity among employees. These educational and training programs concentrate on enhancing interpersonal relationships among employees. Employees are led to reflect on how women and men, and how people of different races, differ in their values, attitudes, ways of thinking, and cultural backgrounds. Employees are also helped to better understand their own feelings and attitudes about people who are different. The desired outcome of increased aware-

Leaders and managers together must learn how to empower employees.

ness and acceptance is designed to reduce discrimination and to explore how the differences may be transformed into assets and creative energy.

But, as R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., has written, "acceptance, tolerance, and understanding of diversity are not by themselves enough to create an empowered workforce."<sup>8</sup> Leaders and managers together must learn how to empower em-

employees, enabling them to work together, achieve a common goal, at the same time satisfy their own interests, and realize better their human potential. Managing diversity seeks to transform the organization at the same time that it addresses the personal and interpersonal dimension of gender, race, and cultural issues.

At the heart of managing diversity lies the reform of internal systems, structures, and processes, as well as the transformation of the organization's culture. Managing diversity not only entails addressing the personal sources of discrimination, but also scrutinizing the system for signs of institutional discrimination.

At the structural level, managers analyze why the system does not empower everyone. Addressing the root causes of frustration in the workplace, of low morale, and of production problems is a managerial concern. The hostility of men toward a female manager, open name calling, or racial slurs are not viewed by their perpetrators as sexist or racist, but in fact these attitudes and remarks are hurtful, undermine trust, and indicate existing dissension that may be subtly reinforced by organization's structures.

The managing diversity process is a long-term response to deep-seated biases that affect the workplace. Transformation of the corporate culture and modification of internal systems are responses to long-standing social friction. The development of a corrective process requires insight, patience, and judicious implementation.

**A LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE**

The current social environment presents Catholic healthcare leaders with an uncommon challenge. The social, financial, and moral forces that are propelling the diversity movement forward will place leaders in Catholic healthcare organizations in a unique position. The moral persuasion asso-

ciated with the Catholic moral tradition will cause many in healthcare careers to look to Catholic institutions for leadership in managing diversity within their healthcare organizations.

To contribute to this social task, Catholic healthcare leaders must first understand the complexities of the issue, the resistances and disruptions managing diversity may generate. Leaders must also reflect on the consequences of failing to manage diversity. In the future, it will not be enough for an organization to ensure compliance with legal requirements or to find ways to contain the ill feelings that employees may harbor toward their colleagues. In the present social climate such efforts will be perceived as incomplete and may give rise to deep resentment.

In the past, efforts to search out appropriate diverse candidates for promotion were often disappointing. In many instances, programs that support disadvantaged groups have precipitated complaints of unfairness, preferential treatment, or reverse discrimination. It is clear that attempts to manage diversity must also take into account the predicaments in which white men now find themselves. Nor will current social attitudes support the theory of assimilation. Persons who cherish their cultural heritage do not want to be blended into a homogeneous but unrecognizable mass.

Awareness of the success and failures of earlier social programs aimed at valuing diversity is important for healthcare leaders. Once the general thrust, as well as the positive and negative implications, of managing diversity are understood, leaders will need to examine their organization's culture. They will need to assess whether internal processes, structures, and systems are supportive of diversity or are a source of social conflict.

At this point it will be essential for leaders in Catholic healthcare facilities to develop a vision for managing diversity. This will involve their ability to think through strategically where their organization's culture must be changed to support a diverse work force. Without a clear and compelling vision, leaders will have difficulty galvanizing their managers to embrace workplace diversity.

A sense of social responsibility alone will not impel managers to overcome the obstacles associated with diversity programs. Financial success may have to be linked with social responsibility as an inducement for managers or directors who are resistant to change. Leaders who continue to view managing diversity as a legal, moral, or social responsibility rather than a business issue will be insufficiently motivated to implement diversity programs. As a result, diversity manage-

ment will be seen as a luxury.

In the future, however, diverse populations will utilize those healthcare organizations and plans which are responsive to them. Managed competition will prompt culturally diverse persons to gravitate toward those institutions and health benefit plans in which they feel comfortable. Managers will come to understand that admissions and patient satisfaction will be tied more and more to a healthcare environment that is reflective of diversity.

Most important, managing diversity has a moral dimension. Managing diversity is a way of exercising social responsibility and positioning a healthcare organization to secure a profitable future. But the primary reason for managing diversity is grounded in the leader's faith. If the healthcare leader's vision is rooted in love of neighbor and a sense of justice, that leader will find ways to enhance employee participation and will set in motion the practices that will attract, retain, and promote capable personnel with diverse backgrounds. Genuine respect for an employee as a person who bears responsibilities that extend beyond workplace production will set the tone for positive interaction among employees. Thus managers' display of appreciation will inspire loyalty and a cooperative spirit. Leaders' respect for a broader and richer sense of personal dignity will encourage employees to embrace their colleagues in a like manner and, perhaps, to participate in education programs with more enthusiasm.

### INTRODUCTORY INITIATIVES

How can Catholic healthcare leaders begin to leverage diversity in their organizations as a source of competitive advantage and employee satisfaction? One initiative that is useful for setting a positive future course is to conduct a cultural audit. Feedback from the audit will yield a realistic picture of the corporate culture and will suggest alternative directions for the future.

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We'd like your views on this article's assertions regarding Catholic healthcare's role in promoting cultural diversity. Let us know what you're doing, or give us any suggestions you might have on future activities for the Catholic Health Association related to cultural diversity. Please take a minute to fill out the postage-paid reply card inserted in this magazine; call Sr. Joanne Lappetito at 314-427-2500; or write to *Health Progress*.

## ANALYSIS

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Properly used, power is a great motivator. "People will do things for power that they won't do for other reasons," Boss said.

### HOW TO USE POWER

One reason people view power negatively is they think when someone else gains power, that means they have lost some. But "power is not zero sum," Boss stressed. "It's like love: The more power you share, the more you'll have."

Admitting your mistakes is another way to increase your own power; it proves you are trustworthy and honest. This has great implications for how we deal with people, Boss noted. "If an issue is emotionally charged, it's a power struggle by definition," he said. "The only way to win a power struggle is not to play it." If someone is angry with you, Boss suggested apologizing even if you feel in the right. "You can be right, or you can have power," he advised.

Forgiveness is also empowering. "When you hate someone, you're in the palm of his hand and he can squish you anyway he chooses," Boss said.

To keep power once you have it, Boss recommended the use of persuasion, patience, gentleness, kindness, teachableness (the attitude that everyone is superior to you in many ways), and accurate information before making decisions. If you must reprove somebody, he suggests following the reproach with increased love to restore trust.

"Leaders must be willing to love and support their people," Boss said. The difference between success and failure, he added, is that members of winning teams love each other. "Catholic healthcare facilities are unique because of the love that permeates them," Boss claimed. In the turbulent times ahead, this love—and the commitment to values and mission fostered by effective mission leaders—will be crucial for the Catholic healthcare ministry to flourish.

—Susan K. Hume

## DIVERSITY

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Among the options that have succeeded in several companies are establishing a cultural diversity task force or putting in place a diversity "champion" who is accountable directly to the chief executive officer. First tasks for the task force or champion are assessing the organization's selection, retention, and promotion policies; establishing a mentoring program; and providing sensitivity training for managers (especially white men) and corporate survival training for minorities and women. It will also be essential to discover what barriers to advancement exist.

Managing a diverse work force is demanding and will require a great deal of leadership attention. As the pressures of healthcare reform build, the temptation to push cultural diversity issues to the background will be strong. But with managed care and managed competition essential components of healthcare reform, can Catholic healthcare leaders morally and financially afford to ignore these issues any longer? □

### NOTES

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2. B. Johnson and Arnold H. Packer, *Workforce 2000*, Hudson Institute, Indianapolis, 1987.
3. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Cultural Pluralism in the United States*, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1981, para. 2.
4. "Lumen Gentium," in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, vol. 1, Costello Publishing, Northport, NY, 1975, para. 9, p. 359.
5. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1986, para. 14.
6. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., *Beyond Race and Gender*, American Management Association, New York City, 1991, p. 10.
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8. Thomas, p. 25.

# Coming in the Next Issue of Health Progress®

## INFORMATION SYSTEMS

*April's special section will focus on information systems for the future. Catholic healthcare providers will tell how they are using technology to link with other providers, physicians, payers, and vendors. These innovative activities include electronic claims processing, telemedicine, and information systems for integrated delivery networks.*

## CATHOLIC IDENTITY

*A Catholic Health Association document provides practical guidance for evaluating Catholic identity as new models of healthcare are created. The self-evaluation process begins with examining an organization's current expression of Catholic identity in four critical areas: mission, sponsorship, holistic care, and ethics. Each theme is briefly discussed, with some pertinent questions for fostering dialogue on Catholic identity.*