

# Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

## VALUING DIFFERENCES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEMONSTRATION OF AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

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### ABSTRACT

A conceptual framework for organizations interested in developing a diverse workforce is presented. An experiential exercise will be demonstrated.

#### Introduction

The vast majority of people are well intended in their approach to dealing with people who are different than themselves. Their motivation is not malicious nor is their intention oppressive. Why then, does individual experience and organizational statistics persistently demonstrate a distribution to attention, rewards and promotions that is disproportionately in favor of a single category of employee? Why is it that exclusion and harassment persists? Why in most organizations in most countries, does one group tend to dominate? The dominant group may differ from country to country, and in some sense, differs from organization to organization. What is common is that in a majority of organizations there is a dominant group: one group that tends to be favored relative to others.

#### Experiential Exercise

In this experiential exercise participants will be briefed on the impact of personal prejudice and organizational preference. Organizations and communities create potent, distinct and narrowly defined images of what a successful or worthwhile person is like and then teach and regulate the behavior of it's members so that they will be as nearly like the image as possible.

In this exercise participants will be asked to compare their own core beliefs relative to the organizational preference rewarded in their place of work. Core beliefs are defined in a longitudinal manner and participants will be asked to physically move from one end to the continuum to the other, then move to the place on the continuum that represents what their organizations actually reward. Six core beliefs are identified.

This exercise physically demonstrates that valuing differences is a key component in creating an organization that will meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse workforce.

When personal prejudice is combined with organizational preference it becomes difficult for a diverse workforce to thrive. The elimination of personal prejudice alone will not alter the status quo, just as by expanding the organizations image of the successful member cannot break the status quo.

**PERSONAL PREJUDICE:** wrongness, dissonance, subordination, rejection, survival, community:  
**PRESERVES SIMILARITY**

**ORGANIZATIONAL PREFERENCE:** rightness, domination, attraction, community: preserves similarity

Creating an organization which values diversity requires strategies which act simultaneously on these forces. Because the processes acting to preserve the status quo are self-sustaining and potent, changing them requires deliberate strategies, which act at both the personal and systematic level. Five phases of the change process are offered with specific interventions suggested for each phase of the process.

#### Time Needed To Perform Activity

1 hour.

#### Use In Training and Development

This exercise serves as a powerful demonstration of how and why organizations need to look at their existing cultures and distribution of rewards. For organizations interested in valuing diversity as well as organizations dealing with international clientele the exercise demonstrates the need to look at the symbolic and nonconscious as well as the rational.

I have used the exercise with small and large groups of diverse populations, international groups, professional groups as well as students. I have found the exercise to be a powerful demonstration of the impact of nonconscious, hidden core values on how people feel about organizations. I recommend the exercise as opening exercise for those interested in diversity training and international and cross-cultural implications.