

## **Becoming Diverse and Enthusiastic About It!**

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*This is an applied paper that focuses on important diversity related practices and activities that aid to become more familiar with and enthusiastic about diversity. It addresses seven different themes that can help managers to educate their employees about diversity and to improve their life at work, as well as within their communities. Those themes are: 1) What is diversity and what does it mean to become diverse, 2) Believing in diversity, embracing and celebrating it in daily activities, 3) The importance of practicing inclusion, 4) Exposing yourself to diversity of activities and personalized relationships, 5) Being aware of our own stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory behaviors, 6) Managing multifunctional and virtual teams across the world, 7) Resolving conflicts with mindfulness and faith practices. Those themes are as important as diversity is for the sake of a better personal life, and better organizations and society.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the last twenty-five years, diversity has become a very important concept in organizations. Diversity is not easy to understand neither it is to manage (Foster & Harris, 2005; Nishi, 2013, Roberge, Lewicki, Hietapelto & Abdyladaeva, 2011; Roberson, Ryan, & Ragins, 2017). A large amount of literature has tried to bring forward different practices to help individuals and organizations to deal with better adapted behaviors to diversity (Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, 2003; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKay, Avery, Liao, & Morris, 2011; Mor Barak & Leving, 2002; Roberge, et al., 2011; Roberge & Xu, 2018). In the same veins, the purpose of this applied paper is an attempt to add to the literature by providing diversity related advices to managers who want to train and educate their employees toward a better understanding of diversity, its benefits, and its related techniques to improve peoples' life in the workplace, with their family members, and with their respective relationships with others in the community. This paper focuses on seven different themes that bring additional ideas to solve the issues related to managing diversity. It shed lights on individual and organizational practices that contribute to enhance the benefits related to diversity. In other words, this paper helps managers and employees to demystified and learn to appreciate what it means to become diverse and enthusiastic about it. It discusses different techniques and practices related to valuing diversity and the consequences of unleashing its full potential in people's life by engaging into daily diversity-related activities and practices.

## What is Diversity and What Does it Mean to Become Familiar with Diversity?

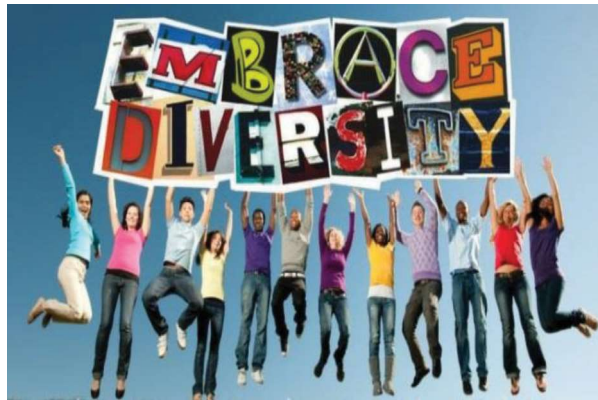


Diversity has been defined as any attributes (i.e., gender, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, personality, interests and values) based on which someone perceives being different from the other(s). Diversity may also refer to groups of identities in common social systems such as at school, with family members, in business organizations, in church movement, in community groups, sports groups, music groups, or other types of groups in society (Roberge & Van Dick, 2010). Diversity relates to concepts such as *differentiation* from others, which means the process by which people learn about their own uniqueness in comparison to others, and *identification* which refers to the process by which people identify themselves with others who share relative similarities.

The process of becoming familiar with diversity refers to the inclusion concept and more specifically to individuals that expand their mind, soul, and heart by including other individuals' perspective into their daily activities, human interactions and relationships. It also refers to an introspection about the beliefs that diversity and its benefits are necessary elements for a better life experience, and for bringing forward a better world. Research has found several diversity benefits to individuals such as the feeling of being accepted by others which increases the overall people's well-being (Mor Barak, Findler, & Wind, 2003; Mor Barak, & Levin, 2002). In organizations, research has found that the benefits of diversity are numerous such as an increase in job satisfaction, group cohesion organizational commitment, intention to stay with the organization, as well as an increase in organizational citizenship behavior and work performance at the individual, group and organizational levels (Roberge & Xu, 2018). Often, research has found that diversity may lead to bringing conflicts and stereotypes which can turn into discriminatory behaviors (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Fiske, 2000). However, when people engage in the process of becoming aware of diverse and its benefits in their daily life, they commit themselves to reaching out to diversity's potential. They commit themselves to better understanding of others for their differences and to get to know them for who they really are. As the following section discuss, when people commit to become enthusiastic about diversity and start believing and embracing diversity, they can accept new values, rules and ways to live their life. They enriched their life which they would not have been able to do otherwise without a true belief in diversity.

From an organizational stand point, becoming familiar with and enthusiastic about diversity means cherishing diversity in their mission statement and core values, implementing different human resource policies related to diversity in different functions of human resource management (e.g., recruitment, selection, training and career development, performance evaluation management) (McKay, Avery, Liao, & Morris, 2011). Establishing and maintaining a climate for diversity in organizations (Nishii, 2013; Roberge & Xu, 2018) by bringing forward leaders who consider inclusion and welcoming behaviors from themselves and their followers, or by establishing effective communication networks and interdependent structures.

## Believing in Diversity, Embracing and Celebrating it in Daily Activities



Believing and embracing diversity requires strong convictions that relate to the confidence that achieving diversity in peoples' daily life is a goal and a value of excellence management. These convictions also relate to the principles that diversity can bring everyone to its full potential in their everyday activities and work assignments. Embedding diversity into everyday activities may takes different forms. For example, mingling with friends or coworkers from different ethnic backgrounds, joining community activities and multicultural events, volunteering and working with people living with disabilities, shopping in international grocery stores, eating at different ethnic restaurants, listening to international music and movies, visiting all types of museums, and traveling locally and/or in different countries. Embedding daily diversity activities into people's life decrease anxiety and reduce depression, which in turn increase human well-being. When people cherish diversity at its fullest, it allows them to increase their life experiences.

Believing and embracing diversity is an effective way to recognize the benefits of diversity such as becoming a more adapted to everyday interactions and relationships that people encounter daily. Diversity enrich people's life by being an eye opener to differences in perspectives, ideas, opinions, insights, values, interests, preferences, and personalities, as well as to recognizing similarities that people share with one another. One of the most important shared similarities is the interest to become familiar with diversity, to embrace and celebrate diversity, and believe that everyone need to contribute equally to bring a better world.

It is by recognizing the benefits of diversity, its richness and endless learning experiences that the world can become more productive and effective. Diversity is rich and brings learning experiences in people's life. It helps them to become better people in interpersonal interactions and with their environment.

The commitment to embracing and celebrating diversity and its benefits starts at a personal level in individual's daily social activities and by becoming more inclusive with others. Becoming diverse requires time and practice. It is possible to achieve it by following some insights that will be further discussed.

## The Importance of Practicing Inclusion



Inclusion is defined as the act of being welcoming toward people of all kind to share life experiences. Being inclusive toward different others is at the core of embracing and celebrating diversity. The literature discusses how to be an inclusive leader to increase the benefits brought by diversity. Indeed, being an inclusive leader is a fundamental concept to enhance and relish the potential of diversity. The practice of inclusion is also related to the awareness of others and their particularities and opinions, as well as the willingness of bringing their perspectives into a discussion that will lead to proactive behaviors and other diversity benefits. For example, being an inclusive leader refers to opening to everyone in a none-judgmental approach by valuing each individual or group for their perspective, and their contributions to the workplace or the community. By being open minded about other peoples' perspective, inclusive leaders are capable to personally relate to different others and identify with them without fear of their differences. Inclusive leaders are easily able to put themselves into someone else's perspective by using empathy and compassion. By doing so, they become capable of understanding others who may perceive themselves as being stigmatized (Robinson, 2006).

For example, being an inclusive leader is related to learning to love others, even the devil advocate (s). The devil advocate(s) may be those who seem to be anarchist or none conformist but who also want to be included for their perspectives and point of views in a collaborative effort. They also want to be heard and accepted as human being and proactive people. It is often those different others who shed light into unalike perspectives and have an interesting contribution to bring to the table of diversity. Finally, being an inclusive leader means that no one must be forgotten, and all perspectives must be taken into consideration in an open discussion.



## Exposing Yourself to Diversity Activities and Personalized Relationships



It is important to become familiar with and enthusiastic about diversity by exposing yourself to different activities related to family, work, the community, and to different social networks. As it has been mentioned previously, becoming familiar with diversity means to try new ethnic restaurants, to visit museums and libraries, or to mingle with people from different community groups. Moreover, activities that help to expand people's mind may be: Attending cultural celebrations (i.e., Chinese New Year, Hanukkah), being part of a gay pride parade, attending drag queen spectacles, joining different community groups that promote different cultures and recreational activities such as culinary, sportive, social, linguistic, spiritual or other types of interest groups. These activities enrich people's brain, soul and mind, and therefore help them to enhance their potential to become adapted to diversity. Also, and more importantly, it helps people to meet new individuals in different settings and to learn from those individuals (Roberge et al, 2011).

Indeed, diversity of relationships is crucial to become enthusiastic about diversity. Learning to deal with different people by observing and interacting with them is fundamental to manage diversity effectively. Humanizing and personalizing your relationship is an asset. For example, trying to remember peoples' names and what they shared with you during your interactions with them is a necessity in becoming familiar with diversity. Valuing and prioritizing the relationships that life brings to someone's social sphere is at the core of becoming more sensitive to diversity. Being sensitive to diversity with family members or any other social settings mean being conscientious of everyone's uniqueness and what they bring as potential efforts to the group's performance. By recognizing each member and considering them as independent entity, for their individuality and their respective individual and group contribution, there will be benefits such as becoming more adapted to diversity. In organization, recognizing valuable members of a group via promotion or honorable mention help the individuals to feel connected with others and emotionally attached to other as group members, which in turn lead to a more supportive social environment. Moreover, as discuss in a previous section, being inclusive in familial or social relationships is a foundation to cherish diversity. For example, this may take place by offering similar opportunities to different family members or individuals of a group at work. Thus, personalizing our relationships with other people is also very crucial to become familiar with diversity. Valuing diversity also refers to being able to accept people without judging them. This important aspect of valuing diversity will be further discussed in the following section.

## Being Aware of Your Own Stereotypes, Prejudices and Discriminatory Behaviors



Stereotypes, often referred to as prejudice, is defined as a preconceived idea about a person or a group of people without really knowing that person or group, or having valid information about that person or group. A stereotype can be positive or negative. Whereas a prejudice is a negative emotion toward someone or a group of people. When stereotypes and prejudices are activated, they lead to discriminatory behavior which may take different forms of antisocial behaviors toward others or counterproductive behaviors. Most of the time, people are unaware of their stereotypes and prejudices. Indeed, people often unconsciously hold stereotypes and prejudices toward different others and such stereotypes and prejudices can often be misleading people to behave in a way that is not welcoming neither inclusive to others (Fiske, 2000).

Recognizing the experience of a prejudice or negative feeling toward someone, or a group of people is not as easy task. Holding on those thoughts and feelings without acting may even be harder. To do so, it requires reflection, introspection and self-awareness. It also needs insights as to how the other(s) is perceived and why such thoughts and feelings are experienced. By being able to get into an insightful reflection, people may overcome their spontaneous response and be more focus on a true understanding and empathetic behavior toward the other individual(s).

As mentioned earlier, developing compassion for other people is a necessity for becoming comfortable with diversity and therefore making sure that stereotypes and prejudices do not play a role in the human interactions. Having compassion for others relates to being able to take the perspective of others and understand their situation without judging. The expression "putting yourself into other people's shoes" is at the core of having empathy toward others. Developing positive feelings toward others by trying to relate to them and their reality, without stereotypes and prejudices, is essential to fully embrace diverse relationships. It requires practice and introspection has the relationship unfold.

## Managing Multifunctional and Virtual Teams across the World



In today's business, the window of opportunity depends on how quick a company can line up diverse talented people regardless of their location (Kaptan, & Roberge, 2008). To do so, implementing virtual teams is often the preferred practice. Virtual teams may not only be composed of people living in different locations around the world, but also of people who work from the same department, who work from home, or at irregular office hours (Greenberger & Wang, 2002).

In virtual teams, it is likely to encounter issues related to managing diversity effectively. Managers may supervise different employees that have never seen each other before and who may not necessarily work for the same organization. Because of such setting, virtual teams may be more likely to experience diversity issues such as a lack of cohesion among coworkers, interpersonal conflicts and those problematic issues may sometime be very difficult to resolve because of a lack of presence information or because of ambiguous communication among team members. More specifically, because often virtual team members do not come from the same organization, diversity and identity issues may be encountered and expressed in such a team. For example, members of virtual teams may be likely to act on their stereotypes and prejudices because of lack of information and problems of identification with one another. Indeed, managers of virtual teams often deal with challenges that did not exist few decades ago. Especially, when teammates are working via emails, telephone calls or chat rooms, they may experience different misunderstandings because of a lack of verbal or non-verbal cues. When these issues occur, teammates are more likely to adopt counterproductive behavior which may decrease group performance.

Managing virtual teams in the workplace required a careful attention. It requires the usage of certain managerial techniques such as organizing occasional face-to-face meetings, allowing employees to take some time at work to share personal information with their coworkers, or encouraging employees to brainstorm ideas before making any formal decision regarding the task. Using such types of managerial techniques may help virtual teams to resolve their issues related to diversity.

## Resolving Conflicts with Mindfulness and Faith



While, the concept of being mindfulness relates to emphasizing practices such as meditation and intuition, the concept of having faith relates to having trust or confidence in someone, or in a situation despite the obstacles and challenges encountered. Both of those concepts are very important to resolve conflicts related to managing diversity in organizations (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004). By being mindfulness and keeping faith in diverse people, it allows everyone to observe the beautiful aspects brought by a diverse group of people. It helps to maintain positive attitudes and prosocial behavior among them. Paying is one of the practice that relates to being mindfulness and keeping faith in diverse groups. Allowing employees to pray during their working hours is a fruitful technique to embrace diversity and its potential. Another technique that helps the management of diversity is the implementation of yoga or meditation classes in between working hours or allowing recess time, off from work for a few minutes for introspection and silence every day. Indeed, paying, yoga, introspection are all techniques that have the power to relieves stress, anxiety and tensions in people's body and mind, which helps people to be more prompt to deal with diversity in an effective and positive way. Moreover, one of the most important intuitive and mediating tool that has been discussed in the literature to resolving conflicts related to diversity is valuing compassion and empathy (Roberge, 2014). Developing compassion and empathy for people and their conditions is not as easy as it may be. As mentioned earlier, often people jump into quick judgement about others based on their stereotypes and prejudices. It is possible to not jump to stereotyping and prejudices by practicing empathy and compassion for others. Such techniques are peaceful to resolve diversity issues. Furthermore, the process of building compassion and empathy toward others requires demonstrating good listening behaviors during interpersonal interactions. Being able to let people disclose themselves and being heard is a thorough practice at the core of building true and honest relationships with one another (Philips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009).

"Putting yourself into other people's perspectives" and trying to imagine how people may think, feel and behave is necessary to help resolving conflicts in a peaceful and elegant way. It is important to not try to imagine how you would feel, think or behave, but instead to focus on how you believe they may feel, think and behave when they are put into the specific situation. In doing so, you give yourself sometimes to get to know someone and their experiences. It is more important to stay none judgmental and be aware of your own stereotypes and prejudices during the mental process. Putting these stereotypes and prejudices apart from your own judgement may sometime require practices. Paying and meditating with introspection and insights may be the key to help developing compassion and empathy toward others.



## CONCLUSION

This applied paper focused on seven themes that are crucial to implement in peoples' daily life how to manage diversity effectively in organizations and in the community. These seven themes are as important as diversity is. This paper suggests some tips, techniques and practices that may help individuals and organizations to deal with diversity with grace and honor. Each of these themes have been thoroughly discussed and may bring further ideas for relishing the full potential of diversity into people's relationships and their life within organizations, and their communities.

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