# Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity

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## The Power to Influence Human Productivity and Career Development

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# FOREWORD

Professionally, I have the fortune to serve as the Vice-President of Organizational Development and Learning Services for a large, academic healthcare system. Being charged with setting and executing the talent strategy for the organization, I recognized the need for a supporting diversity and inclusion strategy. With the retirement of our initial Director of Diversity and Inclusion the decision was made to bring those efforts under my umbrella, and so I began a nationwide search to identify and bring in a talented individual who could help us chart a course forward.

I was fortunate to talk to a wide variety of individuals with impressive and significant backgrounds in the arena of diversity and inclusion, and as I spoke with each I learned more and more about the current state of D&I work—particularly in the United States. It was clear that pioneering work had been done by these and countless other individuals and the workplace in general was better for it. We brought talented individuals in for in-depth interviews in front of diverse and respected panels, and each represented themselves well. At the end of the process neither I nor those who participated on the panels could clearly identify an obvious choice and so I found myself stymied.

I took the period of indecision as an opportunity to reconsider our efforts. What, exactly, was the organizational problem we were trying to solve with the Diversity and Inclusion role? And, were the individuals interviewed well-positioned to help us solve that problem? Most had spoken of well-considered and widely adopted methodologies in the

Diversity and Inclusion arena, such as training in unconscious bias and community-based efforts. While all of these traditional approaches to D&I are noble and worthwhile, I wondered if they would solve our core issue.

And what was our core issue? Simply put, the demographics of leaders in the organization do not closely align with the demographics of the general population in our communities. And, we believe, homogeneity in our leadership is a threat to our ability to achieve our organizational strategy as that homogeneity can and often does stymie innovation and evolution. (And, even a cursory glance at the healthcare landscape in the United States would suggest that innovation and evolution are must-have attributes of any organization that hopes to survive the current era of disruption and rapid rate of unexpected change.) We need leaders who bring a diversity of perspective, life-experience, skill, and background if we are to have any hope of succeeding in achieving our strategic aims.

The problem, then, is that training staff on the unconscious bias would not solve our fundamental challenge. And so what would? I realized that the solution to our problem already existed within our Talent Management processes. They had simply never been utilized with diversity in mind. What levers can Human Resources truly pull to influence a greater and more meaningfully diverse leadership in the organization? Quite simply, the same levers that move all leaders through the organization: succession planning and performance management. And so, we created a role focused on Talent Optimization and Equity to run our succession planning and performance management processes with visibility to and accountability for removing inequities in those processes and ensuring qualified, prepared, and diverse talent throughout our pipeline.

It was during this time of creating our Talent Optimization and Equity role that I received a phone call from Dr. Claretha Hughes; a friend, collaborator, and accomplished scholar. As I described my conclusions and newly adopted approach to Diversity and Inclusion efforts she outlined her most recent scholarly pursuit—this text: Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity: The Power to Influence Human Productivity and Career Development. Human Resources Development has always been a domain where scholars and practitioners regularly align, and here was another sterling example. She described a well-considered and impactful approach to diversity in organizations that was theoretically sound and imminently pragmatic. What I had stumbled onto, Dr. Hughes clearly

articulates in the following pages—that diversity is a strategic enabler and that HRD processes are most effective at unlocking that strategic potential. Her conceptualization of diversity intelligence (DQ) is, at its core, a catalyst for organizational strategy and her initiative to integrate workforce inter-personnel diversity into talent management systems is an innovative extension of her work to value people and technology in the workplace. Both scholars and practitioners would be wise to give careful consideration to the ideas presented herein.

And so my organization carries on in its efforts to find the right talent to move the organizational strategy forward, regardless of that talent's background or demographic. I am fortunate, we are fortunate, for committed scholars such as Dr. Hughes who laid a path forward to realize those efforts.

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# Preface

There are many books about diversity in the workplace in the market-place today; however, those books do not focus on workforce inter-personnel diversity. Many employees are homogeneously grouped in positions and are limited in their opportunities to advance and grow within their careers. When employees attempt to change their positions or seek higher salaries, positions are eliminated or employees are replaced by machines. Interpersonal diversity focuses on relationships between employees. Workforce inter-personnel diversity is about the differences between employees and their individual skills despite having the same job classification or position description.

Workforce inter-personnel diversity is defined as a focus on the ways that individuals differ in their personal characteristics and job skills based on five values (location, use, maintenance, modification, and time) within the workplace (Hughes, 2012). Many organizations are seeking ways to optimize workforce performance. To distinguish between employees in the workplace, employers have focused on understanding employees' personality styles and learning styles. Yet, employee potential has also been limited because of perceived biases and other limiting factors. Many of the biases occur because some leaders lack diversity intelligence (DQ) (Hughes, 2016).

"For many organizations, the definition of diversity has evolved from a focus on legally protected attributes such as race, gender, and age to a much broader definition that includes the entire spectrum of human

differences" (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 410). Focusing on the entire spectrum of human differences is inherently difficult if not impossible. Similar to DQ, workforce inter-personnel diversity must be defined within the context of the workplace for it to have significant meaning. Workforce inter-personnel diversity can be used to objectively examine a wide spectrum of human difference in the workplace. Understanding the inter-personnel characteristics of employees and using those differences to enhance the individual and the organization is the second option. The first options are legal requirements to attain employee diversity in the workplace, and many leaders only do what they are required to do by law or organization policy (Hughes, 2018).

Organizational leaders typically look at each job position, characterized as the same based on pay and job description, in the same way. They hire employees to do the work in that particular position and often do not consider other capabilities that the employees may possess. For example, in a call center, phone workers do their work using the same or similar scripts. When an organization is hiring for manufacturing positions and the abovementioned call center example, they need people to perform the immediate work and not all of them look for that employee to ever be promoted, reassigned, or developed beyond that specific position. I have worked in several global organizations and consulted for quite a few, and they tend not to hire beyond the capability to perform the current position description. I also worked on the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council textbook and production employee certification standards where we developed ways to teach employees that their skills are transferable beyond their current positions. We developed certified production technician standards so employees could be developed. We examined 13 different manufacturing industries for years to develop the textbook. Labor unions including the AFL-CIO, business and industry, and academic institutions were all represented during this project (See http://www.msscusa.org/certification/).

Limited consideration is given to other knowledge, skill, and ability that the employee possesses. Workforce inter-personnel diversity seeks to explore those diverse characteristics and begin to understand each employee's strengths and weaknesses so that they can be developed to benefit the employee and the organization. The main academic audience for this book are human resource development and human resource management instructors and researchers who focus on helping

organizational HRD and HRM research and practice. This book may also be relevant to HRD and HRM practitioners. Another audience for the book are workforce development scholars.

The subject areas/fields most directly connected with this work are strategic human resource development, human resource development, workforce development, organizational behavior, and behavioral operations management. Instructors in HRD and workforce development will be able to use this book as a resource for modules on communication, team performance, work structure, leadership, learning, among other core issues relating to performance and productivity in modern organizations. Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) instructors will be able to use this book as a resource for high-level courses addressing strategic human capital utilization. The book will also serve as a resource for practicing managers as it provides a set of directly, actionable levers to develop and manage individual employees and work teams. Professionals who are a member of the Association for Talent Development (ATD), Society for Human Resources (SHRM), and International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) may also find the book beneficial.

Some scholars (Konrad, Prasad, & Pringle, 2005) focused on the international perspective to justify workplace diversity. I characterize it as a justification of diversity because they are making the case for why diversity is needed as opposed to accepting that diversity in the United States is the norm. There is already diversity within many organizations, but diversity is not leveraged effectively because of conscious and unconscious bias and marginalization of many protected class employees (Roberson, 2013). There is also systemic racism. Unless the authors have a proper frame of reference for the state of diversity in each organization, they often miss the diversity that is already present and continue to justify the need for diversity as opposed to being more inclusive and providing equity for those who are already present. By providing more equity in leadership positions, for example, more awareness of how to attract, select, and retain more diverse employees may occur. If the effectiveness and visibility of the diverse employees who are present are continuously diminished, progress will never occur.

Ferdman and Deane's (2014) book addressed making the workplace more inclusive and addressed some of the concerns of the global society, the organization, and employees from an interpersonal perspective. This book will focus on the employee level of workforce inter-personnel

diversity because many leaders look at employees as the same if they are performing work in the same positions. Their differences are not valued as much as the bottom-line performance of the workgroup. The structure of the position does not allow workforce inter-personnel differences to be recognized and rewarded, often leading to less productivity. Those who can perform at higher levels do not do so because there is no incentive to perform better.

This book also focuses on retention and development of all personnel by accepting workforce inter-personnel diversity. Once the employee is recruited and selected for a position, the characteristics that they showed during the hiring process should be valued and developed. Many employees are hired into a position and asked to perform only the work in that position, although they may bring additional, diverse knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to the workplace.

The key benefits of workforce inter-personnel diversity is to not rehash whether or not diversity is needed but to focus on the successes of diversity beyond the discriminatory aspects often associated with diversity. Diversity already exists in most workplaces, and diversity's effectiveness is hindered because of biases that exist. This text will acknowledge the biases but seek to go beyond the biases to focus on what each individual employee offers to the organization. Since there are so many discriminatory categories within diversity and bias can occur with each one, the emphasis of this book will be on valuing the workforce inter-personnel diversity as opposed to scorning or overlooking it. The book will suggest and share examples of successes as opposed to failures of diversity training programs (Alhejji, Garavan, Carbery, O'Brien, & McGuire, 2016).

Personnel is the key term in this book and the focus is on personnel within the organization who are treated the same simply because they have the same position title as a peer. I call this inter-personnel because the personnel are within the same organization and same position. This occurs across many professions as well. Assumptions are made that all teachers, all nurses, all bus drivers; all housekeepers, etc… are the same simply because they are in the same professions. There is workforce inter-personnel diversity within professions. The book will include specific learning/training objectives, several cases, and examples.

Data should also be valued in the workplace. When I originated my concept of people as technology (Hughes, 2010) in the early 1990s, I used many data to determine that people are not the main problem in workplaces. Big data and data analytics, as we know this concept today

is finally becoming a norm in assessing workplace performance. Data analytics can be a major component of workforce development if used appropriately to enhance as opposed to demean workers.

In Chapter 1, *Introduction: An Holistic Approach to Examining Workforce Inter Personnel Diversity*, A holistic approach to examining workforce inter-personnel diversity is needed as organizations seek to improve their productivity. Each employee provides value to the organization and that value should be recognized and rewarded. One concern with workforce inter-personnel diversity is that some individuals think that it is just another way to (re)package the construct of "skill set diversity" among and between employees within the same position. However, skill set diversity is typically aligned with a specific skill set. When I refer to workforce inter-personnel diversity, I am looking beyond just the skills necessary to perform the specific tasks of the position. I am also referring to location in and of the position. I am referring to the ability to transition beyond the minimum skill set required to maintain the position. Some employees have the minimum skill set and can maintain that level of performance but as the position is escalated to require additional skills, the employee may not have the capacity to be further developed for that particular position anymore. I am also looking at how that person would self-develop if their position were to be eliminated for a new type of position within the organization or replaced by technology.

In Chapter 2, *Description and Recognition of a Quality, Inter-Personnel Diverse Workforce*, organizational leaders should know and understand all employees in the workplace. Being able to recognize and describe a quality, inter-personnel diverse workforce is essential as organizations seek to use the talents of all employees to increase productivity. Each individual possesses unique characteristics that contribute to their location, use, maintenance, modification, and time value to themselves and the organization. Not all employees' unique characteristics are of value to the organization but organizational leaders will not know that if they do not know how to assess and recognize the quality needed to meet organization goals. Many organizations miss out on productivity opportunities because they do not leverage the knowledge, skills, and abilities of all employees. Each employee's contribution combined creates added success for the organization. This chapter provides some key characteristics of quality workforce inter-personnel diversity. The chapter also suggests that workforce inter-personnel diversity can be an area or system within which HRD professionals can manage and measure quality of their services to employees.

In Chapter 3, *The Role of Workplace Leaders Who Champion Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity*, A supportive culture, champions, communication, time, and change are needed to sustain workforce inter-personnel diversity in organizations. Many workforces have undereducated and undertrained employees. For effective change to occur leaders must champion change efforts. Leaders are needed to champion workforce inter-personnel diversity efforts in the workplace. The champions must be dedicated to employee development efforts. They must inspire employees to perform to meet productivity goals; provide leadership that attracts followers to help them achieve organizational goals; establish realistic job performance criteria; provide appropriate performance incentives; and support skill-based and/or performance-based pay efforts. Champions must expand their view beyond a narrow frame which can become rigid fallacies and block opportunities for success. Extending thought processes beyond the norm can allow HRD professionals to gain credibility and an opportunity to lead more workplace initiatives. Leaders can use their power to establish workforce inter-personnel diversity so that all employees become a part of alliances and networks that have a reputation for success. They can help their followers understand how to work together because of their understanding of symbols of success for the organization. Within workforce inter-personnel diversity systems, champions can manage employee efforts using competency, skill, and/or performance based pay systems so that all employees feel valued by their organizations based on objective measures.

In Chapter 4, *Using Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity as a Unique Talent Management System Component*, to develop employees in the workplace, the employee, the organizational leaders, and the HRD professionals must all believe that the employee has potential. To motivate a diverse workforce with different KSAs within the organizational culture, the focus should not only be upon the differences in various protected class categories but also on how to capitalize on these dissimilarities by building bridges upon or over them using workforce inter-personnel diversity strategies. This book asks organizational leaders, and HRM and HRD professionals to look at talent management from the workforce inter-personnel diversity perspective. They can consider developing all employees by position and still accommodate high potential employees. Workforce inter-personnel diversity as a component of a talent management system must be evaluated and sustained to remain a viable tool for leaders and employees in the workplace. Managing

workforce inter-personnel diversity requires forward-thinking approaches including establishing unity among employees, valuing employees' qualifications, training and developing employees, supporting employee self-development, providing career pathways and management systems that support the pathways, and valuing employees' time. Organizational leaders' DQ, and acknowledgment and understanding of all employees provides them with the workforce inter-personnel diversity knowledge to enhance and improve organizational performance.

In Chapter 5, *Valuing Independent Thought Within Cultural Groups in the Workplace*, there are many cultural groups in the workplace. Many members of these groups are treated as if they are monolithic in their thoughts and actions. Although organizations are different, their leaders are sometimes monolithic in their perceptions of cultural groups. Not all cultural group members have the same views on structure, policies, and beliefs. Culture differences and the constant evolution of each society dictates that some accommodation and adjustment for differences be made. The alternative is embarrassment and failure of businesses that have had to suffer unnecessary loss of reputation and money because they do not acknowledge cultural differences. With rapid changes of America's demography, the social and ethnic composition of the workforce is changing. However, the contribution of some groups is not always optimally utilized. HR practitioners and scholars are beginning to review their understanding of formal diversity policy and their actual inclusive HR practices. Organizational leaders who are willing to think differently about diversity within cultures and integrate them into workforce inter-personnel diversity initiatives may produce results that cost the organization only the amount of time it takes to align people to their strengths and potential. They will avoid having hidden figures within their organizations as those who are performing at their best will be openly recognized for their performance.

In Chapter 6, *Using Workforce Inter-Personnel Diversity to Alleviate Generational Differences*, the history of the American workplace has been predicated on a variety of generations of employees working together to meet organization goals. The systems within the organizations usually were designed around seniority when there were unions in many workplaces. Unions are very infrequent in the American work system and seniority is not valued as it had been in the past. Intergenerational differences are great within organizations when the generations cooperate with each other and the system does not reward seniority over skill. This theme is not suggesting that seniority or generational differences

are bad. It is just focusing on solving some of the problems by using workforce inter-personnel diversity to increase the skill levels of all employees and providing recognition of these differences. To achieve success through generational differences, comprehensive workforce changes are needed. As the baby boomers retire and many young people have left rural communities for urban areas, understanding generational differences in the workplace has become much more important. The use of workforce inter-personnel diversity can help organizational leaders shift their focus from employee ages and toward employee performance.

In Chapter 7, *Conclusion*, improving human productivity and their career development opportunities will continue to be a goal of employees and organizations into perpetuity. There is no end in sight for the number of ideas and variety of ways to explore the implementation of ideas to meet human needs throughout the world. Some organizations are exploring the use of technology to facilitate productivity but technology is still guided by the thoughts of the humans who program it. The knowledge that humans have is bounded only by their ability to turn what they think about into applicable tools to use in their worldly endeavors or to sell to their peers. Organizations focus on practical application of theoretical knowledge. If the knowledge cannot be applied, it is useless to employees as they endeavor to provide maximum quality for their organizations. Having knowledge alone has never been enough for an organization to thrive especially in a capitalist society where time is money. The workforce must be adept at figuring out ways to apply all knowledge and training to organizational processes. I would suggest that an extension of the difference between education and training is that organizational learning requires a combination of education, training, knowledge, and skills to succeed. To continue to leverage workforce inter-personnel diversity into every aspect of the organization, organizations should choose appropriate training and development delivery methods using technology and data analysis to support their efforts.

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