Part 2
Expanding Reality
Boundaries provide a convenient mechanism by which to structure reality. It gives shape to our world views, social relations, and geopolitical spaces. Without the ability to construct boundaries, we would find the physical realm around us chaotic and undecipherable; we, therefore, create boundaries to order our world. This ability to construct boundaries has enabled us to create complex institutions such as business corporations. We have bestowed “personhood” on corporations so that, among other things, they can be subject to taxes. Through boundaries established by legislative fiat, government regulation, and legal precedent, corporations have thrived as complex institutions who can acquire resources and other businesses just as we can as private citizens. Corporations, as persons, have developed personalities (brand/image), created cultures (sense of purpose/values), become pioneering (research/global expansion) and, at times, lapsed into sinister behavior (greed/fraud). Although corporations, like our governments, have incredible sway over our daily lives, it is we who have created them. We can redefine their boundaries.¹ This is the underlying premise of the chapters that appear in Expanding Reality.

Not only are boundaries constructed and given legitimacy, they are demarcations between “in” and “out” that have profound impact on our identities of who we are vis-à-vis others. These identities are powerful. It is what makes for strong cohesiveness in teams. Olympic national teams are good examples of team solidarity. Winning for these teams brings fame, lucrative sponsor contracts and national accolades to those who individually or collectively excel in their sport as part of their country's team. Similar demarcations, though not as visible, create groups in all aspects of social life – many of these groups are institutionalized, e.g., voter blocs, nonprofit associations, social clubs, and companies to name a few. What advocates of diversity are most concerned about is expanding our realities of inclusion. They are not “against” boundaries per se or institutions constructed through them. Instead these advocates are vigilant, constantly testing a boundary’s permeability with respect to gender, race, lifestyle, or religious creed. More specifically, they want to know what criteria – declared or practiced – forms the basis for
determining the rights of full participation. Full participation goes beyond the notion of entry. It embraces practices, structures, and roles within a group that may create pockets of undue advantage or disadvantage.

The chapters included in this section were selected to emphasize three aspects of expanding the realities of inclusion. First, the struggle for inclusion is contextually historic and experiential in the sense that foundations of inclusion that we take for granted today were, in fact, forged through struggles of the past. Recognizing the contributions from those who grappled with their respective generations’ issues of inclusion not only provides us with a sense of gratitude for their hard won effort, but also of hope that boundaries are permeable and can be re-constituted. Second, realities of inclusion in which diverse contributions are recognized require a re-tooling of existing mindsets and capabilities. In order for diversity policies to deliver value, training and changes to existing processes may be necessary. Such fundamental changes require senior leadership commitment that goes beyond declared policies; for example, executives may need to create and support change programs which institutionalize new or revamped cultural values. Third, the final aspect of expanding the realities of inclusion is forward looking, i.e., searching the outer edges of boundaries with a vigilant eye on what still needs to be done. Selected papers supporting this area take the baton from others who have fought to make institutional boundaries more permeable.

Of the four contributions by authors, James Joseph’s, Managing Diversity: the United States Experience provides a historical context in the struggle for inclusion. Joseph’s essay exudes credibility as “lived experience.” He has witnessed, participated, and led much of efforts that characterize the US experience as the American people grappled with the boundaries of inclusion. Joseph identifies three distinct pluralistic paradigms – segregation, assimilation, and egalitarian pluralism. He offers pragmatic advice to leaders on how to organizationally leverage diverse identity group differences to advance learning and success within firms.

With the same intent as Joseph’s advice to leaders, Mario Ghiggino in his chapter Diversity: Ideas to Create Value in the Workplace adds to the discourse on diversity by suggesting that employees bring a wealth of talent to an organization that can be classified through an “Agents Model” in which employees are agents of creativity, agents of continuity and agents of change. “Fit” of employees to the right jobs with these agency components brings bottom-line value to the firm. Ghiggino also argues that “ideas segregation” creates barriers within firms – especially those with a global reach – from exploiting the rich diversity of its employees. He posits that it is only through developing effective listening techniques that these barriers are neutralized.

This part ends with two chapters whose theme is active engagement at the societal and firm levels. Tony Burnett and Simon Kettleborough in their paper, New Frontiers for Diversity and Inclusion, urge us to step out of our over-burdened, well-meaning daily environments and expand our notions
of inclusion to embrace the plight of others whose lives are defined by poverty. They use a series of five myths to make their case for inclusion in which governments and global business promote a “winning together” approach to interfacing with others in the world. Lastly, Jennifer Kam and Joanna Eidsmore in Applying Burlesque Rhetoric to Create Social Change remind us that retrenchment always lurks at the out edges of boundaries. Corporations such as Abercrombie & Fitch can slip into racial stereotyping, using humor as its defense. Rather than focusing on the “outrage” of such corporate behavior, Kam and Eidsmore tackle the issues of effective communications and alliance building across racial boundaries as a means of maintaining vigilance at the boundaries of inclusion.

Note

1 Even in the most despotic regimes, bounded structures are created to maintain itself. These types of regimes are changeable. The timeframes for change may be much longer than in more democratic regimes.