

# Diversity Dynamics – Extensive Inclusiveness

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## ABSTRACT

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In response to emerging societal demands, organizations have been attempting to address the social-systemic challenge of diversity. While a virtuous goal, many initiatives seem to be rushed and not pursued systemically, with unintended consequences. And, the outcomes are typically far lower than the potential available in society to organizations, for-profit or non-profit.

Traditional approaches to diversity inclusion have often been narrowly focused. The implementations that the authors have researched are often driven in a quick-fix manner. These have attempted to fulfill *legal obligations* quickly. Or, they are *matching numbers* in a we-too manner. Or even, *bikeshedding* by attending to trivialities. Simplistic models abound.

But the soundest decisions related to human – and social – aspects of organizational life require a much more careful, serious analysis beyond fixes and fulfillment. A system dynamics approach is essential in order to take an extensive look at inclusiveness so that the scope and span of the populace being considered is holistic and not limited or narrow.

Three things must be considered to make inclusiveness extensive. First, is a *definition* issue that tends to restrict the diversity considered by organizations. What is pursued is “inherent diversity” which is based on the traits like ethnicity, gender, race, etc., and people who have contacts with the influential, have acquired resources to be networked, and then they are obviously visible for consideration.

What gets left out, even if unintentionally, is “social class” diversity which is considered the “underclass” or people at the periphery – and not the mainstream – of society. Paul Ingram (of Columbia) has shown this class to be almost three-fourths of Americans whose parents do not have a degree and have little access to contacts, financial resources, and networking among the elites and the “haves”.

Social-class diversity is actually a social majority. While less privileged, they do not lack intelligence and self-worth. They can build cultural bridges and, as they are often not egoistic, they earnestly strive for achievement. They open new markets and bring in multiple perspectives which can become the fountain of ideas that a monolithic culture alone cannot attain.

An exclusive focus on inherent diversity can actually perpetuate confirmation bias and lead to conjugative dissonance. Pursuing only inherently diversity creates a *tilt* and limits the target demographics pursued by many diversity programs. These limit the scope of (internal) inclusion and (external) social integration. But this makes the accessible more visible and, inaccessible even more ignored.

Secondly, both types of diversity – inherent and social-class – can benefit by acquiring skills and traits that are gained longitudinally over time and by moving people across various departments and regions. Such initiatives create “acquired diversity” which is essential for widening the perceptions and decisions made by organizational managers. But how does dynamic diversity help in all this?

Our research shows a few organizations that are not rushing; they are involving a fuller scope of diversity to become extensively inclusive and to lift up their societies. Apple, DFW Airport, Flowserve, and the Government of Oman are a few examples. Countries with broad immigration (Canada, U.S.A., etc.) and with majority expat communities (Singapore, U.A.E., etc.) can best reap fuller potential.

Thirdly, in diversity decisions and implementations, many organizations take a project approach; set a timeframe and fill in the numbers with diverse individuals. Such attempts have start-end dates, fixed one-time budgets, and an emphasis on numbers – all favoring additive approaches over synergistic methods. It is rare to see ongoing programmatic approaches that lifts all diversity types.

Futuristic approaches to extensive inclusiveness necessitate a systemic attitude, that is, starting with systems thinking and then modeling the dynamics of diversity inclusion *and* development. The authors developed a tested model (a partial conceptual vignette is attached) that substantiates their dynamic hypothesis of “extensive inclusiveness”. It provides insights for management including:

- Definitions and perspectives that are, and can be, used – with their impact on organizations and their societies.
- A diversity system—and its interacting components often tackled independently – for acquiring (extensively inclusive) diversity.
- Policy and strategy insights for businesses, for governments, and for business-government collaborations.
- Time-bound project versus developmentally-sustained program approaches that develop diversities as well as lift up entire societies.
- Reorienting organization cultures to benefit from differences in viewpoints and creating effective Leader Integrators <sup>1</sup>.
- Closing the gap between desired and actual organizational diversity profiles also requires building internal capabilities.
- Harnessing innovativeness that results from engaging in critique which is a natural consequence of diverse thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> The Leader Integrator is a set of concepts and practices developed by one of the authors. An extract of this is published as a chapter in The Leader of the Future 2, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

## EXTRACTED PARTIAL VIGNETTE OF DYNAMIC DIVERSITY (Highly Abridged)

*Vignette represents two types of diversity selection and the relative weightage of project approach versus developmental program approach. The investment in developmental programs – while has a time delay – eventually creates acquired diversity internally and also lifts the society externally through **extensive inclusion of both** inherent and social-class diversities.*

