

# Beyond Diversity: Building Cultures of Inclusion

*By Nancy J. Di Dia*



Nancy Di Dia brings more than 25 years of experience in management and diversity practices in corporate America to her role as executive director of Diversity & Inclusion and Climate at Boehringer

Ingelheim. Prior to beginning her role in May 2006, Ms. Di Dia was a senior consultant with the FutureWorkInstitute, a strategic partner of Towers Perrin.

Copyright © 2009 by Nancy J. Di Dia. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

As organizations begin to focus more deeply on their people agendas, there's a growing awareness that diversity terminology has become almost outdated, even politically incorrect. I don't mean to suggest that organizations are moving away from their diversity agendas. Rather, large organizations that were long considered early pioneers in the diversity movement over the past 15 years—Fortune 100 companies such as JPMorganChase, IBM, BankofAmerica and Johnson & Johnson among them—are no longer devoting their efforts single mindedly to justifying the business case for a diversity agenda. They have become more integrative, focusing their efforts on fostering an 'inclusive' environment.

In today's challenging economy, there are many good reasons for these organizations to do this. First, many CEOs want their top performers to be the best business people, and they are committed to exploring the middle management pipeline to identify and cultivate talent within the ranks. Much to the surprise of senior management and the chagrin of middle managers, these pipelines are not only filled with talent, but also happen to be stocked with a wide variety of ethnicity, race, gender, varying abilities and orientations.

Building an inclusive environment not only helps CEOs and top level managers cultivate their next leaders from middle management who also happen to fall among the ranks of different genders, races, and ethnicities, but it also helps to develop and foster those individuals of various backgrounds who may not be on anyone's radar screen.

Inclusion is about the expanded potential of all who are willing to demonstrate their abilities. As a practitioner in this field, I prefer using the term inclusion instead of diversity primarily because it instills a sense of community and integration rather than a segregation or separation of identities. With inclusion, folks will feel valued and also part of the decision-making process, rather than having thoughts like: I am being selected because I'm the token Asian or am I being selected because I'm "out" and gay or lesbian?

For those organizations that have just begun establishing their diversity agenda, switching gears to focus to inclusion may be the last thing they want to hear. But the efforts are well worth the task. Not only will a focus on inclusion improve engagement, rather it will help their organizations return on investment and enhance profitability.

## The Path to Inclusion

---

Many prominent Fortune 100 companies have switched their focus from a diversity agenda to an environment focused on inclusion. Here are some suggestions on creating an inclusive culture.

- ◆ Examine employee morale, turnover and promotions. First assess your company morale. Is there a lot of rumor mill-noise floating around? Also, look for patterns of resignation among your most talented people. When we look at the largest factor surrounding employee satisfaction, we have learned that it's mostly about the level of respect and opportunity employees are given from their direct managers one on one and "around the meeting room table" in front of their colleagues and senior managers. With that in mind, take a look at the turnover in middle management, including females, males, people of color, as well as Associates and those with less than 5 years of service in your company. Is there a pattern? What are the costs of losing these recruits?

You should also examine recruiting and promotional patterns. When was the last time you hired the “right person” for the job-not the “diversity candidate”?

- ◆ Conduct a climate study. Your goal should be to assess how well your organization is performing compared to the competition and your industry. Also, explore the last time a new idea was implemented and celebrated by someone other than a senior officer. How often do you encourage input from all members of a meeting? When was the last time you took the time to thank your staff for a job well done?
- ◆ Allow employees to ‘shine.’ Given the opportunity to shine in a friendly, inviting and supportive environment, individuals will take the bait and go out of their way to present good ideas. Spotlight the talented ones. Foster cultures that encourage risk taking. Plans that go awry are not to be considered inherently bad, but rather good lessons for learning. These “lessons learned” could be integrated into new and enhanced ways of running businesses and organizations.
- ◆ Create circles of inclusion and affinity. Have lunch with a colleague you don’t know or who may be from a different part of the world. Move out of your own “comfort zone” and challenge yourself to include somebody in your meeting you know very little about. Challenge your managers to do the same and encourage them to step out of their comfort zones, as well. Lead the Inclusion effort!

# Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

**Linkage**  
**Burlington, MA**  
781.402.5555  
info@linkageinc.com