Chapter 17
Re-Conceptualizing Diversity Management:
Organization-Serving, Justice-Oriented, or Both?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights how diversity management, a widely practiced management philosophy, has emerged from an original focus of equal opportunity and representation to a focus on a strategic and competitive business opportunity for organizations. However, the adverse, lived experiences that socially marginalized people experience are concealed within business goals despite having their "difference" marketed as a competitive advantage. The aim of this chapter is to conceptualize diversity management as having mutually inclusive, intersecting goals rather than mutually exclusive, competing goals.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity management is a widely practiced management philosophy but in praxis, it is a relatively ill-defined, ambiguous term (Foster & Harris, 2005). In the academic community, scholars have contributed various perspectives of diversity management that have positioned the concept as an organization-serving philosophy that is in direct opposition to safeguarding and protecting the socially marginalized workforce from unjust and uncivil treatment. Socially marginalized refers to a state of reality that exists for some groups of people whom society has categorized as not being the standard by which society recognizes as being the accepted norm (Byrd, 2018); and as result impacts the everyday, lived experiences of the work environment.

Lived experiences can produce incidents, episodes, and events that socially marginalized people endure and interpret as being demeaning, demoralizing, disrespectful, and prejudicial to their image in the workplace. Consequently, these experiences can be detrimental to self-esteem, self-worth, job satisfaction, and job performance which are all variables that can be career altering and impact career satisfaction.

Lived experiences can occur in any context that an individual performs meaningful work. These types of behaviors and incidents are often perceived as being directly related to an individual's social location (race, sex, age, ability, religion, or other similarly social constructed categories). Therefore, a necessary function and goal for diversity management is recognizing demoralizing behaviors and taking the appropriate steps to expose, correct, and eliminate the source(s) of the behavior. Problematic is that a business opportunity case for diversity fails to capture the everyday, lived experiences of socially marginalized members of the workforce.

As a derivative of the management process, the idea of diversity management or managing diversity underscores the socially constructed meanings of who is categorized as being diverse and incorporates a business rationale that is often antagonistic and sometimes inimical to genuine equality and diversity concerns (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). Combining the term diversity with management conjures up the image of historical realities of dominance and subjugation. In this sense, diversity management is a continuance of power over. Furthermore, given the managerial inclination towards control, order, and regulation, the ambition and practices of managing diversity contradict the stated goals and result in less, rather than a more diverse (which is understood to be heterogeneous), pluralistic and varied organization (Risberg & Just, 2015).

In this chapter, two dichotomies of diversity management are highlighted: promoting diversity as a strategic business opportunity to gain a competitive advantage and operationalizing diversity management principles that respond to the lived experiences of socially marginalized groups. The lived experiences of socially marginalized people is a relatively unexplored area of diversity management. Moreover, the ethical, moral, and social obligations of diversity management have received scant attention. In bringing to light this omission, another goal of this chapter recognizes social justice as a necessary outcome of diversity management.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

1. Explain the influencing rhetoric of diversity in the evolution of diversity management;
2. Discuss philosophical assumptions of diversity management;
3. Discuss the dichotomized views of business opportunity and a justice-based perspective;
4. Recognize foundational models, worldviews, approaches, and contexts for applying diversity management;
5. Discuss criticisms that have challenged the application of diversity management;
6. Explore social injustice as a less recognized concept associated with diversity;
7. Present theoretical foundations fruitful for bridging the gap in diversity management studies; and
8. Discuss future research directions for achieving business goals and justice-based outcomes.

Through examining the varying definitions and models of diversity management, and reviewing relevant literature, this chapter will present a social case for diversity and offer how the lived experiences of socially marginalized people has been neglected and left behind in pursuit of an organization-serving philosophy.

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