Eradicating Employment Discrimination: Toward a Cultural Values Perspective

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At the outset of their article, Lindsey, King, Dunleavy, McCausland, and Jones (2013) stated “we do not limit our discussion of strategies to reduce discrimination to classically studied racial, ethnic, and gender differences. Instead, we broaden our scope to consider all types of marginalized groups.” What followed, however, perhaps did not pay just consideration to the multifariousness of diversity. Although distinctions were made between various forms of minority status, including visible (e.g., ethnic) and invisible (e.g., religion), perceivably controllable (e.g., obesity) and
Diversity as Culture: The Associative and Social Self

One such framework is the diversity as culture paradigm, perhaps best explicated by Chao and Moon’s (2005) cultural mosaic theory. Cultural mosaic theory begins from the notion that individuals hold multiple and overlapping identities, that no minority member is either simply “female” or “Black,” or “gay”—individuals draw on patterns of tiles in regard to social identity. Cultural mosaic theory further distinguishes between geographic, demographic and associative tiles, whereby geography pertains to identity as constructed by national boundaries, demographic tiles are visible and inherited features of the self (e.g., race, sex), and associative tiles are invisible and adopted features of the self (e.g., avocation, religion); one’s particular constellation of these tiles defines one’s unique cultural construction (Chao & Moon, 2005).

Importantly for discrimination eradication, cultural mosaic theory argues that context makes salient any particular identity constellation and that interpersonal interactions are facilitated by shared cultural identities. This line of reasoning finds confluence with social identity theory, whereby social identities are extensions of the self beyond the individual (Brewer, 1991). In this latter view, personal identities are characteristics that differentiate the self from others, whereas social identities are context-bound, chosen, categorizations of the self that depersonalize the individual in order to find commonality with others; optimal distinctiveness is achieved when an individual is able to maintain a certain sense of unique identity while simultaneously finding common ground with a larger collective through selection of salient and associative aspects of the self (Brewer, 1991).

Put another way, focusing upon associative and social versus personal and demographic aspects of the self moves conceptualization of diversity from a category-based perspective and toward a values-oriented perspective. That is, marginalized group members, invisible and otherwise, are perhaps more likely to find attraction to, inclusion, and retention in organizations that share commonality of associative values because value congruence is likely more indicative of shared cultural characteristics, as opposed to mere superficial and group-based similarities. For example, an older, White, female, and a younger, East Asian, male who are both academically oriented research scientists that belong to the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology may find much in common through confluence of professional and educational similarities, and even to the extent that aforementioned demographic similarities may be rendered largely irrelevant.

In fact, extant theory and research on common ingroup identities buttresses this view; finding commonality of associative aspects of the self has been found to reduce both perceived and observed prejudice and unfair discrimination against members of marginalized groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Within the industrial–organizational psychology literature, this view finds confluence with Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) theory, whereby individuals are attracted to, selected by, and retained in organizations that are similar to themselves (Schneider, 1987), and whereby person–organization fit is most predicated upon value congruence between the individual and the employer (Kristof, 1996). Thus, shifting focus toward culturally shared values as opposed to mere demographical surface similarity may be key toward attracting, including, and retaining marginalized group members in organizations.
Cultural Values and the Eradication of Employment Discrimination: Potential Applications

Hence, in order to help eradicate unfair discrimination in employment, it is postulated that organizations approach diversity with an eye toward shared, culturally bound commonalities in values that may cut across surface and demographically bound differences. The cultural values perspective may be applied toward recruitment, selection, inclusion, and retention phases of the employment cycle. Such cultural values may be communicated through explanations regarding both organizationally relevant attitudes and behaviors.

Recruitment and selection. A cultural values perspective would suggest that simply utilizing the efforts of recruiting agents who share demographically similar characteristics to potential applicants from marginalized groups or highlighting surface demographic characteristics of the employee pool in organizational recruitment tools (e.g., ads, brochures) may not suffice. When approaching potential minority-group applicants, recruiting agents could be trained to steer conversation with
regard to finding common ground with minority-group applicants that subsume or intersect with their shared identities, such as commonalities with regard to educational or professional backgrounds, sports teams, or work-oriented values, for such commonalities cut across demographic groups. In organizational recruitment tools, organizations could communicate a clear explanation of their organizational cultural values and provide exemplars that embody such values. For example, an organization wishing to increase its talent pool with regard to women may communicate aspects of its culture that lend itself to feminine orientations, such as the existence of daycare centers or work–family balance; an organization wishing to attract talented Asian applicants may stress aspects of its organizational culture that reflect collectivistic values, such as shared feedback or task systems, or employee bonuses that are predicated upon overall group performance. By communicating cultural value congruence with potential applicants, an organization would thus likely be able to create a diverse workforce that cuts across demographically situated boundaries and bring together a collective of individuals who share common values and interests.

As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, however, a potential pitfall to such an approach is that demography and culture are related. Thus, a hidebound focus on a small number of cultural values could potentially backfire and serve to limit organizational diversity in the long run because individuals with highly similar cultural values tend to be attracted to, selected by and retained in like-minded organizations (Schneider, 1987). Thus, in order to safeguard against culturally homogenizing processes dictating the long-term formation of a demographically homogenous organization, organizations would need to highlight various aspects of their cultures that can simultaneously appeal to various marginalized applicant demographic groups. For example, an organization could emphasize the existence of daycare facilities and a shared task/feedback system, and perhaps best do so in a way that emphasizes the organization’s value congruence with desired applicant groups. To this end, an organization’s judicious measurement and comprehension of its own cultural values, and careful communication of such values, would be necessary in order to attract and recruit a diverse workforce with regard to cultural orientation. By way of implementation, organizations could assess their own mean cultural orientations through use of incumbent employee perceptions of organizational cultural values/practices and individual cultural orientations, and assess cultural orientations of potential employees by assessing and measuring individual cultural dispositions, such as collectivism, during the employee application process (c.f., Gelfand et al., 2007, for an overview of organizational- and individual-level cultural conceptualizations). In addition, use of such measures to assess individual dispositions in cultural orientation may also benefit validity of the selection procedure, insofar as the individual level of culture may be conceptualized as situated in personality (Marcus & Le, 2013) and given that personality assessments have been shown to provide incremental validity beyond job experience and cognitive ability (Hough & Furnham, 2003).

Inclusion and Retention. Organizations could foster work environments that encourage and embrace multicultural values toward work through job design, supervisor training, and workgroup composition. In job design, an organization could provide features that appeal to individuals of differing cultural value orientations. For example, an organization could simultaneously reward pay for performance, thereby embracing a masculine cultural orientation, and provide work–family flexibility through providing daycare centers or flexible work hours, and thereby also embracing a feminine cultural orientation. As another example, an organization could offer rewards for individual achievement through performance (e.g., publishing in top journals) while also rewarding...
employees who dedicate themselves to organizational service outside of the formal job function (e.g., providing counseling to needy students), thereby rewarding behaviors reflective of both task and relationship orientations toward work. To buttress multicultural pluralism at work, supervisors and managers could be educated on cultural aspects of diversity as part of a diversity training package. Simultaneously, and where possible, the organization could match employee–employee or employee–supervisor groups on cultural value congruence, such that employees are able to form professional relationships at work with individuals who share common cultural values, irrespective of demographic differences. Thus, minority-group organizational members from diverse demographic backgrounds could find commonality in organizational environments that share their values and perhaps foster more dynamic and pluralistic organizational cultures in the long run.

Conclusion
Through adopting a focus on associative as opposed to demographic aspects of the self, manifested as commonalities in cultural values, organizations may be able to recruit, include, and retain a diverse workforce that cuts across superficial group boundaries, while perhaps also accruing benefits to important organizational criteria such as employee satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment. Such a broader and values-based perspective may perhaps be better positioned to help eradicate unfair discrimination in employment with regard to the entire spectrum of marginalized groups, visible, invisible, and otherwise, as opposed to a continued conceptualization of diversity as a collection of mere demographic boxes.

References