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## Diversity dilemmas call for thoughtful solutions

Apparently, "diversity" still is a dirty word.

Novations Group, a global consulting organization based in Boston, asked more than 2,000 senior human resource and training executives to characterize their management's attitude toward diversity. Forty-eight percent said they accept the business case for diversity and do what is necessary to leverage inclusion with the organization.

"Even though organizations are increasingly committed to corporate diversity, what many don't seem to grasp is the broader need for inclusion," said Mike Hyter, chief executive of Novations.

Here are some dilemmas that can impair effectiveness because of noninclusion.

### MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Judy is chief negotiator on a potential deal to contract with a new supplier. She meets with the supplier, Joe, accompanied by her accountant and lawyer, both of whom are men. As negotiations begin, Joe makes eye contact primarily with the men, even when she has asked the question. Joe also seems to address his questions to the men instead of to her. Judy is feeling irritated. This guy does not seem to understand that she is the one in charge.

Why worry? Judy may lose interest in doing business with Joe as a potential supplier, even though he may have a valuable of-

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fering. Just imagine future communication problems. She cannot envision a long-term, positive relationship with him. Because buying decisions are partly emotional, Judy may feel the need to keep looking. If Joe is selected, this could come up again.

Possible approaches to solving this:

- Make team members' roles clear from the very beginning. There is a possibility that Joe misunderstood who the real decision maker was.

- Consider how Judy's team's body language may be giving mixed signals on hierarchy. Nonverbal cues are powerful, and Joe may be responding to the team's signals as to who is in charge.

- Male team members should take it upon themselves to redirect questions and make comments to clarify that Judy is the boss. The team's ability to be aware of the dynamics and work as a cohesive unit is a joint responsibility, not just Judy's.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT STYLE

A team gathers to discuss a work-related issue that needs a decision. Half the team is outwardly engaged and debates energetically. The other half is relatively quiet. An occasional comment from them is dismissed quickly by the dominant personalities in the room.

Why worry? The more introverted thinkers are not being given the opportunity to contribute in a way that corresponds with their style. Their style is not to engage passionately on demand; they may want to contemplate, review details and consider out-of-the-box alternatives. But



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### DISCUSSING DIVERSITY

because their ideas are never exposed to the team, they leave feeling "railroaded."

Possible approaches to solving this:

- Appoint an objective, experienced facilitator to avoid a free-for-all format.

- To allow for different processing styles, consider discussing issues in two rounds. For example, outline the issue and preliminary thoughts as a group, and then hold a second session later where the issue is fully flushed out and decided. This allows those who need "think time" to prepare.

- Use a "round robin" format, giving each team member time to share thoughts.

- Encourage playing devil's advocate on all proposed solutions.

### THE EYES HAVE IT

The leader of a multicultural team brings the group together to discuss how they will divvy up a new work project. Most members are equally qualified to perform the required roles, though some roles will involve more visibility.

Some are quick to express interest in a particular role, and the others stay quiet. The leader recognizes what has happened, but does not want to open a can of worms. She divvies up the roles not spoken for, so everyone can get to work.

Why worry? On the surface, this is a classic cross-cultural dilemma, where some members value individual initiative and competition, and others value cooperation and group harmony. Those who favor harmony are likely to deem the others as selfish and arrogant. Those who favor individual initiative wonder why the others don't speak up for what they want. The result: Those who don't speak up will feel alienated.

Possible approaches to solving this:

- Provide training to the team to raise awareness about cultural differences. Cultural issues often look like interpersonal issues until you understand differences in values. Set clear ground rules in an early stage of team formation.

- Depending on the general state of team relations, the leader might want to allow the team to work through the issue. He can point out what he sees going on and break the team into small groups to discuss what they are personally thinking and feeling.

Intentionally or otherwise, when organizations don't field the whole team, how can they expect to win in this competitive global marketplace? Diversity is simply a means to an end. The goal is the inclusion of everyone's hard work, knowledge, talent and creativity. Only when people are included can their contributions be maximized.

Have you ever seen anyone hit a home run or throw a no-hitter from the dugout?

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