

# Chapter 2

## General Concepts About Inclusion in Organizations: A Psychological Approach to Understanding Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations

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### 2.1 A Psychological Approach to Diversity

Humans evolved as social animals developing groups and social organizations; in this sense, the groups individuals identify with continue to profoundly affect all aspects of social and individual functioning. Social identities delineate those who are members of one's group (ingroup members) and those who are not (outgroup members). Ingroup membership, in turn, defines a bounded community of mutual trust and obligation that delimit mutual interdependence and cooperation. The ingroup provides valuable material benefits (e.g., through reciprocity and support) but also psychological value (e.g., by increasing a sense of security and feelings of esteem). By contrast, when others are defined as outgroup members, they can readily arouse threat and elicit competitive orientations, which often justify their exclusion and exploitation. In complex societies in which people have multiple roles and diverse identities, the dimensions on which people are included or excluded can have significant impact on both individuals and organizations. Diversity can thus either be a valuable resource or a detriment to effective functioning within organizations, depending how it is approached and managed.

In this chapter, we next consider the powerful psychological effects of group identity and categorization—boundaries that define who is included and who is excluded. Then, we discuss the two most dominant approaches to managing diversity in societies and organizations, colorblindness and associated assimilationist strategies compare to multiculturalism. After that, we highlight how understanding the psychological challenges and benefits of diversity is critical for

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managing the dynamic landscape in which diversity operates within organizations and to build more inclusive and effective organizations.

## 2.2 Social Identity and Categorization

Because of the evolutionary significance of group life, people automatically categorize others as members of the ingroup or the outgroup. This distinction has profound psychological and social consequences (see Dovidio and Gaertner 2010, for a review). When they think about others in terms of their membership in the ingroup or outgroups, people spontaneously value those perceived to be part of the ingroup more (ingroup favoritism) and often devalue those viewed as members of a different group. People process information more deeply and accurately about ingroup than outgroup members (Van Bavel et al. 2008), evaluate them more positively (Otten and Moskowitz 2000), and communicate more effectively with them (Greenaway et al. 2015). Also, people typically behave in a spontaneous cooperative manner in their exchanges with others within their group (Bear and Rand 2016) and display greater loyalty to their group and its members when attractive alternatives are available (Van Vugt and Hart 2004).

While cohesion, cooperation, and commitment represent generally positive organizational qualities, the dynamics of social categorization processes may compromise these benefits as the boundaries defining group membership unfairly exclude individuals because of their social group membership. Because of the social significance of the group distinctions, people automatically—often without conscious intention—categorize others based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, and other socially significant dimensions. This process can create substantial social divides and fissures that undermine coordination, morale, and performance within organizations. Internationally, social diversity is rapidly increasing, and thus understanding the impact of different strategies for managing diversity within organizations is a critical, pressing issue.

## 2.3 Psychological Theory and Approaches to Managing Diversity

Approaches to managing diversity involve two broad types of diversity ideologies, *colorblindness*, which is a form of assimilation that focuses on de-emphasizing different group memberships (Wolsko et al. 2000), and *multiculturalism*, which focuses on acknowledging and valuing diversity.

### 2.3.1 *Colorblindness and Assimilation*

Assimilation of members of other groups into a society can take many forms. One of the most common of such approaches in organizations is colorblindness that emphasizes a shared identity in place of other (e.g., ethnic, gender) group identities. If successfully adopted, it has a number of immediate benefits, particularly with respect to reducing existing intergroup tensions within an organization.

According to the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Gaertner et al. 2016), factors that induce members of different groups (e.g., ethnic groups) to recategorize themselves as members of the same more inclusive group (e.g., the particular organization) can reduce intergroup bias through cognitive and motivational processes involving ingroup favoritism (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000; Gaertner et al. 2016). Recategorization changes the conceptual representations of the different groups from an “us” versus “them” orientation to a more encompassing, superordinate “we” connection. Creating a salient common identity thus harnesses the forces of ingroup bias that produce more positive beliefs, feelings, and behaviors usually reserved for ingroup members, but now extends or redirects these forces toward former outgroup members because of their recategorized ingroup status. As a consequence, when members of an organization accept and endorse a common identity they show more positive attitudes toward each other and to the organization and are more trusting and cooperative with each other and more committed to the organization.

However, the effectiveness of colorblindness may be limited both in implementing the approach and in its consequences. Attempts to create a colorblind community may face resistance, particularly among individual with strong allegiance to other identities. Individuals are often reluctant to forsake personally and socially important group identities (e.g., ethnic group identity) to adopt a new shared identity. When attempts are made to forge a common identity, they show resistance and often experience distress (Crisp et al. 2006). Moreover, attempts perceived as imposing a colorblind ideology within an organization are likely to be perceived as communicating disrespect to those who identify with other groups. In intergroup contexts, members of minority and traditionally disadvantaged groups are highly motivated to be respected by majority and advantaged-group members (Bergsieker et al. 2010; Shnabel and Nadler 2005), and the failure to acknowledge their social group identity is perceived as an affront to them and their group (Apfelbaum et al. 2008). In terms of consequences, emphasizing commonality through colorblindness while de-emphasizing others, distinct social identities increase conformity of views and action, narrow the perspectives expressed within an organization, and reduce the organization’s ability to consider and respond effectively to the diversity that exists in global markets.

### 2.3.2 *Multiculturalism*

To the extent to which multiculturalism makes different group memberships salient, it can activate ingroup-outgroup biases and exacerbate intergroup tensions. For example, emphasizing a multicultural ideology tends to increase stereotyping of members of other groups (Wolsko et al. 2000). Moreover, this heightened salience can increase realistic (material) threat or symbolic threat to traditional values and culture experienced by majority group members and produce social backlash by the majority group to minority groups (Craig and Richeson 2014; Plaut et al. 2011; Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta 2014). For these reasons, members of majority groups support a multicultural ideology less (and a colorblind ideology more) than do members of minority groups.

However, multiculturalism typically involves more than recognizing and accepting group differences; it also highlights the positive interdependence of the various groups. Gaertner and Dovidio (2000), Gaertner et al. (2016) proposed that thinking in terms of a dual identity, different groups within an overarching common identity, permits the recognition of distinctive qualities of members of different groups in ways that support a common identity—conceiving the relationship as “different groups on the same team.” Thus, group differences in a dual identity, a form of multiculturalism, are considered a beneficial resource to achieve common goals. As a consequence, members of majority groups attend more closely to the needs and ideas of members of minority groups when they adopt a multicultural perspective than when they endorse a colorblind perspective (Vorauer et al. 2009). This deeper and more individuated processing promotes dialogue and the exchange of personalized information, which in turn facilitates perspective-taking and mitigates the influence of stereotypes within the immediate interaction and undermines that application of stereotypes to the group as a whole (Miller 2002; see also Peters et al., Chap. 12 in this volume). Moreover, dialogue groups, because they recognize the different perspectives, needs, and experiences of members of different groups while fostering interpersonal and intergroup connections, foster the kind of respect between groups that is central to multiculturalism (Gurin et al. 2013).

However, multiculturalism under some circumstances can exacerbate social discord within an organization. To the extent to which members of a majority group believe that their identity is not included and respected in multiculturalism, they respond more negatively to the policy and show greater negativity toward other groups and may be more competitive in their orientation (Plaut et al. 2011). Affirming the importance of the majority group within the organization with a multicultural orientation can also have negative consequences. To the extent that both subgroup (e.g., ethnic) and superordinate group (e.g., organizational) identities are salient, people—mainly members of the ethnic majority group or of the socially dominant in the context—may tend to project the standards of their group as the standards for the superordinate group (i.e., ingroup projection; Mummendey and Wenzel 1999). That is, when a common identity is salient for members of different

groups, members of one group or both groups regard their subgroup's characteristics (such as norms, values, and goals) as more prototypical of the common, inclusive category compared with those of the other subgroup. When this occurs, the outgroup is judged as substandard, deviant, or inferior, leading to greater bias between the subgroups (e.g., Waldzus et al. 2004). However, this ingroup projection effect is ameliorated when the superordinate identity is one that is complex, including many facets that are necessary and desirable, rather than simple, in which membership is defined along a singular dimension (Ukes et al. 2012).

## **2.4 Building XXI Century Inclusive Organizations: Psychological Challenges and Benefits**

Not only do the different approaches to managing diversity psychologically—colorblind assimilation and multiculturalism, have different benefits and potential costs, but their effectiveness depends on many different dynamic factors within organizations. Thus, colorblindness and multiculturalism may be viewed as complementary rather than competing strategies for managing diversity and inclusion within organizations. When group tensions within an organization are high, members of different groups tend to be mistrusting of other groups, sensitive to cues of bias, and unwilling to engage in behaviors, such as informal contact or cooperative actions, that can reduce intergroup anxiety and promote organizational cohesion—not simply because of their personal negative feelings but also because they anticipate rejection by members of the other group (Shelton and Richeson 2005). Under such circumstances, emphasizing diversity can create even greater psychological and social divide (Insko et al. 2001). Thus promoting a sense of common identity—a key element of colorblind assimilation—among the members of different groups may be a critical first step to relieve tensions and create a foundation for mutual trust. Organizations and their Human Resource Management System play a key role in developing collective codes (see Hoel and McBride, Chap. 3 in this volume) and learning as an effective answer to promote inclusive leadership and workplaces (Workman-Stark 2017).

Although establishing a sense of common ingroup identity is challenging during periods of intergroup tension and conflict, it is possible. Indeed, the issue of conflict is one that the groups already have in common. Kelman (2005), for example, described the activities and outcomes of a program of workshops for Israeli and Palestinian leaders designed to improve intergroup relations and to contribute to peace in the Middle East. These workshops attempted to create a sense of commonality by emphasizing common fate in terms of the existential interdependence of the groups: The long-term fates of Israeli-Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East are inexorably intertwined, and mutual cooperation is an outcome that is more desirable to both groups than is conflict. After conflict is allayed and opportunities

are introduced to induce cooperation between members of different groups to achieve mutually desirable goals (superordinate goals; Sherif et al. 1961) formal acknowledgment of group differences can be reinstated, but in a way that highlights how these differences contribute in essential ways to the successful accomplishment of these goals.

While this emphasis on commonality and colorblindness can have some immediate organizational benefits, harmony achieved through colorblindness can be unstable. One reason is that groups have different orientations toward colorblindness depending on their status (Verkuyten and Martinovic 2012). Members of traditionally advantaged groups tend to prefer colorblindness over multiculturalism. One reason, which may not represent conscious intention, is that colorblindness tends to be system-justifying (Jost et al. 2015)—it reinforces traditional standards, policies, and procedures, which tend to favor members of already advantaged groups. By contrast, members of traditionally disadvantaged groups, within organizations as well as societies, generally favor multicultural approaches and policies, which convey respect (Bergsieker et al. 2010) and affirm and empower (Shnabel and Nadler 2005) their group. Moreover, colorblindness can cloak group-based disparities, for example, in opportunities and achievements, within an organization; to the extent to which group memberships other than the common organizational group identity are de-emphasized, disparities between the subgroups within the organization often go unnoticed or unaddressed (Dovidio et al. 2016). Thus, unless there is salient, concrete evidence that subgroups are appropriately represented in high-status positions within the organization, members of minority groups are suspicious of colorblind policies, which erode their interest in and commitment to the organization (Purdie-Vaughns et al. 2008).

Adopting forms of multiculturalism that acknowledge both difference and commonality may be less comfortable and arouse more intergroup tensions than emphasizing only common identity, colorblindness, and assimilation, but these potentially negative effects may be relieved when diversity is seen as essential to organizational identity. When an overarching organizational identity is represented as one that is more complex and in which different groups are not only included but also integral (e.g., by highlighting the importance of diversity), members of traditionally advantaged groups are less likely to project their group's standards onto the organization, and they are more likely to accept members of other groups within the shared organization identity. As a consequence, they have a more positive orientation to diversity and difference. Members of traditionally disadvantaged groups experience a greater sense of belonging in organizations that espouse a complex identity that they perceive is inclusive of their group. As a result, they experience less stress and less interference with their cognitive functioning, which enhances their personal productivity, as well as their organizational commitment (Cheryan 2012).

In the long term, respecting difference within the context of common connection can reap social and material benefits for both majority- and minority-group

members, as well as for the organization as a whole. People show greater integrative complexity (Antonio et al. 2004) and display greater creativity in diverse than homogeneous groups (Crisp and Turner 2011; Leung et al. 2008), and when diversity is acknowledged and respected people are more open and motivated to learn from each other (Migacheva et al. 2011; see also Hahn et al. 2014). Endorsement of a dual identity and the adoption of a multicultural perspective can thus motivate members of majority groups to perceive the value of the distinctive potential contributions of members of different group and communicate the respect that minority-group members seek in their intergroup interactions in ways that promote understanding and acceptance of diversity for common advantage. This collectively generated environment favors social dialogue and facilitates the creation of integrated inclusive values, policies, and practices at organizational level.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Groups are essential to human existence, both evolutionarily and in contemporary life. Group identity has potent effects psychologically. It can bring individuals together: People automatically value others whom they see as members of their group and willingly cooperate with them to promote the interests of their common group. Group identity can also divide: People value members of other groups less than members of their group, and are more spontaneously competitive and mistrusting toward them. The challenge of diversity in organizations is thus to recognize that diversity is the “social default”—that the world is diverse—and that managing diversity effectively is critical for attracting, retaining, and maximizing the productivity of employees for the organization. However, this management requires a thoughtful and informed balance between stressing commonality—at its extreme colorblindness—and difference within the context of common identity or cooperative relationships among groups. Understanding the psychological dynamics of group identity can thus help leaders respond nimbly and effectively to the social circumstances of their organizations. Intergroup relations are dynamic, often shaped by broad social influences outside the organization, and so assessment of organizational climate and knowledge of psychological process are critical to developing and applying the appropriate policies to cultivate the significant benefits that diversity offers. Social dialogue promotes organizational change to help achieve more inclusive workplaces (Gurin et al. 2013; Munduate et al. 2014). These dialogues, however, require both organizational commitment, reflected in management’s inclusive policies and practices, and the reinforcement of positive attitudes and behaviors in the reward structure of the organization. When nurtured and supported, diversity and difference can be valuable resources and can enrich the experiences of both majority- and minority-group members within the organization.

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