



Diversity-centric Corporate Culture a Must

By Dr. Lorne Foster

Insect scientists at the University of Sydney in Australia have recently discovered that Honeybees may all look alike, but it is their diversity that helps make them more efficient as a group.

The researchers found that bees like to keep the temperature in their nests at a warmish 32-to-36 degrees and do so by clustering together to add heat or by fanning their wings to cool things off. In normal hives – that include bees from several different fathers resulting in genetic diversity – as the temperature rises, more and more bees stop other jobs and begin fanning to cool things down. Conversely, as temperatures declines, some stop fanning and go back to other jobs while others kept fanning until it gets cooler. The result is a more efficient task allocation in cooling and warming the hive, leading to relatively even temperatures on average, allowing workers to respond to change without overreacting. Thus, in the Honeybee world, the synchronized management of diversity is the key to a proficient, comfortable, and well-coordinated hive.

Consider that the entomology of bee hive diversity is not unlike what sociology has long known about managing human diversity in a pluralistic society like Canada. In the new millennium, ethno-racial inclusion has the potential to make contemporary societies more fluid, comprehensive and efficient.

Every common-sense and forward-thinking account of the big human picture recognizes that a “diversity-centric” corporate culture - that is, a culture that hones and maximizes a multicultural workforce, and sales force - will be a mandatory 21st century requirement. In an era of global markets and local needs, institutions increasingly rely on the language skills, cultural knowledge, life experience, and international connections that people of diversity bring to the workplace. Multicultural minorities can allow institutions to capitalize on an expanded pool of talent, foster more cooperative working relations, promote a positive corporate image, secure open lines of communication with diverse communities, and assist in priming domestic and international partnerships.

In this respect, in order to take advantage of all of our mixed endowments, it has been stipulated that a diverse corporate culture has to embrace the following five fundamental components:

- A) An acceptance (led by management) of a workforce that will “embody different perspectives and approaches to work.”
- (B) Valuing a variety of opinions and contributions.
- (C) An environment that imposes high standards upon all employees in and equal manner.
- (D) A structure that stimulates personal development.

- (E) And finally, a system of communication that is fluid and open, where workers are made to feel valued for their contributions.

However, from a sociological perspective, it is important to grasp the fact that worker bees have been better able to manage diversity than Canadian workplaces. Recent studies reveal that the “potential of pluralism” has proved to be more elusive in our human world, where most Canadian institutions still operate as if the multiple realities of a ethnically and racially diverse population have nothing to do with the way they carry on their activities and continue to rely on “traditional management techniques.” Mainstream workplaces are still dominated by White males, and are based on White male experiences, with the result that workplace structures and cultures rarely accommodate the value systems, styles of interacting, or life complexities of people of colour. (This is not an indictment of White men but a recognition of failed opportunity). As a consequence, while visible minorities represent a substantial and increasing segment of society - 13.4 percent as of the 2001 census - they comprise virtually zero percent of the substantive "mainstream" economic power.

For instance, the Spence Stuart/Rotman Report found that all corporate boards in Canada have only a paltry 1.7 per cent visible minority representation.

Furthermore, as as Ottawa-based artist Sharon Fernandez has noted in a recent Toronto Star article, if we look at a sampling of the approximately 170 federal agencies, boards and commissions, using survey standards of 10 per cent, it would tell even a more exclusive story. In fact, as far as one can tell, the following agencies conspicuously have zero representation of visible minorities.

In culture agencies such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, Canadian Museum of Civilization and the National Gallery.

The same goes for commercial agencies such as the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation, Copyright Board of Canada, Competition Tribunal and the Industry Task Force on Spamming.

Ditto for the Human Rights Commission, RCMP Senior Commissioners and External Review Committee, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the National Capital Commission.

Meanwhile, according to the “Conference Board of Canada - 2004 Report: Making A Visible Difference,” though visible minorities accounted for one-third of economic growth in the past 10 years, they earned 11 per cent less than the Canadian average in 1991. This gap grew to 14.5 per cent in 2000 and is predicted to continue widening.

In addition, failing to recognize the past skills and experience of visible minorities immigrants is now harming the entire Canadian economy. Here the Conference Board estimates that the annual costs of unrecognized learning for visible minorities ranges between \$2.2 billion and \$3.4-billion.

All in all, this adds up to sad commentary on lost opportunities and squandered potential, and recommends crashing through the traditional organizational structure, in favour of a new, more egalitarian, non-bureaucratic structure that promotes the exchange of ideas and perspectives, and welcomes constructive challenges.

What we need now it seems is only to muster the commonsense and foresight of a Honeybee.