

# Incorporating Multicultural and Workforce Diversity Leadership Attributes and Efforts in Contemporary Leadership Practices



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## Abstract

Established and respected leadership practices such as Transformational Leadership Bass [1], Bass [2], Authentic Leadership Luthans & Avolio [3], and Distributed Leadership Lumbly [4] are known for offering an understanding of the ways that leadership skills can be applied and practiced in a variety of organizational settings. These well-known leadership practices are also known for underscoring the kinds of traits and behaviors that leaders should possess to enhance their leadership abilities and overall effectiveness. However, one area that is absent from traditional leadership practices is a focus on the kinds of multicultural and workforce diversity leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities that organizational leaders should possess to manage human diversity effectively in a variety organizational setting. The aim of this paper is to: 1) share examples of existing multicultural and workforce diversity frameworks that offer insights for advancing traditional leadership practices; and 2) highlight the benefits of incorporating multicultural and workforce diversity leadership traits, behaviors and supporting diversity practices into traditional leadership practices.

**Keywords:** Workforce diversity; Organizational leadership; Traditional leadership theories; Workforce diversity leadership; Multicultural leadership

## Introduction

Changing demographic trends globally over the past decades, along with rising harassment and discrimination cases and complaints in society Banks [5]; Thomas [6]; Cox [8]; West [9]; Wentling and Palma-Riva [10]; Gilbert (2005); Byrd & Scott [11]; Kendi [12] continue to inform organizational leaders of the need for welcoming, respectful, and inclusive environments for all individuals to thrive in. In responding to this concern, many educational institutions and organizations have embraced the benefits of human diversity by creating multicultural education and workforce diversity frameworks along with policy and practices to help individuals develop the competencies and skills for effectively educating, working with, and leading individuals from diverse backgrounds Banks [5]; Thomas [6]; Cox [8]; Howard-Hamilton [13]; Petryk, Thompson, & Boynton [14]; Banks [5]; Hughes [15], Byrd and Scott [11]; Kendi [12].

Yet, despite these efforts, research continues to confirm that numerous problems still confront many minorities, women, the disabled and immigrants in seeking to fully integrate into today's society. For example, stories of discrimination, racism, sexism, harassment, discomfort, alienation, frustration, and overall lack of success in fully integrating into communities, educational

intuitions, and organizations persists Banks [5]; Thomas [6]; Cox [8]; West [9]; Heymann & Sprague [16]; Tseis [17]; Kendi [12]. In this paper, examples of multicultural and workforce diversity frameworks will be highlighted that offer insights for advancing the utility of traditional leadership practices. This paper will also underscore the benefits of incorporating multicultural and workforce diversity leadership traits, behaviors and supporting diversity efforts into traditional leadership theories.

## Examples of Multicultural and Workforce Diversity Frameworks that Could be Utilized to Advance Contemporary Leadership Practices

In a dissertation by Scott [18], entitled Giving Voice to Experiences of Adults Participating in a Multicultural Immersion Program, a literature review of multicultural and workforce diversity frameworks provided examples of their utility in organizational settings. In the focus areas of multicultural and organizational diversity practices examined by Scott [18], Thomas [6], Cox [8], Wentling and Palma -Rivas (1997) and Maltbia, (2001) were highlighted as being recognized researchers who have studied extensively contemporary and evolving organizational diversity and multicultural leadership efforts and supporting

workforce diversity practices. In Table 1 below the current and evolving organizational practices in the areas of diversity and multicultural leadership, and management are offered by Thomas [6]; Cox [8]; Wentling and Palma -Rivas (1997) and Maltbia [20]

from distinct perspectives. A discussion of each organizational diversity practice will follow highlighting the core elements and critiques of some of the practices.

**Table 1:** Organizational Diversity: Contemporary and Evolving Practices Defined.

Author (s)	Key Concepts	Definition/Description
Thomas [6]	Managing Diversity	“Managing diversity [a form of leadership for diversity] in organizations] is a comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees” (p. 10).
Cox [8]	Creating the Multicultural Organization and Leadership – A Focus on Diversity Leadership	“Leadership refers to the need for champions of the cause of diversity who will take strong personal stands on the need for change and assist with the work of moving the organization forward” (p. 230).
Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1997)	Diversity in the Workforce: A Literature Review Diversity in the Workforce Series Report # 1	“The main focus of this report is to describe in detail the literature on diversity in the workforce to bring about an understanding of the complexity and breadth of workplace diversity issues. The report also intends to provide insights on the trends that have emerged in the field of diversity, and information that can be used to develop new and unique approaches that fit the needs of particular organizations” (p. v).
Maltbia [20]	The Diversity Practitioners Study	“The researcher was interested in understanding not only the “what” and “how”, “but also the “why” behind the approach that the selected sample of diversity practitioners used to help the organizations address diversity in the workplace” (p. 2).

### The Role of Diversity Management

As corporations continue to become more diverse and global, and diversity remains a core business issue, as previously highlighted, effective diversity management in organizations will also be necessary. According to Roosevelt Thomas [6], diversity management is a strategy designed to assist organizations in creating “steps for generating a mutual capability to tap the potential of all employees” (p. 10). For Thomas [6], diversity management is a “new” organizational management strategy that “approaches diversity from three levels simultaneously: individual, interpersonal, and organizational” (p. 12), thus making diversity a core issue of concern within organizations (p. 12). Thomas [6] views the strategy of diversity management as not only focusing on issues of “race and gender, but all other dimensions of diversity” such as social class, age, disabilities, ethnicity, and military experience (p. 12). Thomas [6] also believes that diversity management “is not a quick fix management program” or a group of coordinated objectives aimed to give the appearance that organizational diversity concerns are being addressed (p. 12). Instead, he maintains that diversity management is; 1) a strategy that “calls for more than changing the corporation’s way of life; 2) implementing it takes many years” (p. 12); and 3) the effectiveness of diversity management “depends on the ability [of managers at all levels] to empower the total workforce” (p. 10).

### The Role of Diversity Leadership in the Multicultural Organization

According to Cox [8] a multicultural organization is one that seeks to assist all of its workers, regardless of their varying backgrounds in reaching their personal and professional goals,

while contributing to the success of the organization. The exclusive characteristics of multicultural organizations offered by Cox [8] consist of the following:

- i. “A culture that fosters and values cultural differences
- ii. Pluralism as an acculturation process
- iii. Full structural integration
- iv. Full integration of the informal networks
- v. An absence of institutionalized cultural bias in human resource management systems and practices
- vi. A minimum of intergroup conflict due to the proactive management of diversity”

In addition to the above, Cox [8] stated that effective “leadership, is needed to convert established organizations into multicultural organizations (p. 231). Below, a summary is provided on Cox’s leadership component needed to effectively guide multicultural organizations.

### The Role of Leadership Practices in the Multicultural Organization

Effective leadership is critical in transforming existing organizations into multicultural organizations (1993, p. 230). For Cox [8], leadership in this context suggests that organizational leaders must become change agents so they can “model” the passion, attitude, and professional conduct needed to transform established organizations in multicultural organizations (p. 229). For example, Cox [8] noted that organizational leaders and change agents of workforce diversity must also demonstrate the following:

a) [A]" commitment of resources (financial and human and resources) towards workforce diversity initiatives.

b) Inclusion of managing diversity as a component of the mission and vision of the organization.

c) A willingness to change (develop if necessary) corporate-wide human resource management practices, such as performance appraisal and compensation systems.

d) A willingness to keep mental energy and financial support focused on managing and valuing diversity for a period of years, rather than months or weeks.

e) The establishment of valuing diversity as a core objective of the organization that receives the same priority as other core values such as safety, integrity, and total quality".

Cox [8] further highlighted that in addition to having top leadership's commitment and support for a workforce that is diverse, support and commitment for workforce diversity is also needed at the mid and lower manager levels of the organizations, to ensure that human diversity and supporting efforts are integrated throughout the organization and that human diversity is being managed effectively at all levels of the organization (p. 232).

### The Role of Diversity in the Workforce: A Literature Review

In December of 1997, researchers Wentling and Palma-Rivas published a literature review entitled *Diversity in the Workforce Series Report 1: Diversity in the Workforce: A Literature Review* (p. 4) to highlight existing research on the practice of workforce diversity "and bring about understanding of the complexity and breath of workplace diversity issues" (p. v). Their literature review explored the following themes that relate to this paper: 1) "why organizations are valuing and managing diversity", and 2) "strategies for managing diversity" (p. 11).

**i. Theme One:** Why Organizations are Valuing and Managing Diversity. The reasons why organizations are valuing and managing diversity according to Wentling and Palma Rivas findings (1997) is because it will allow them to be more competitive by: 1) appealing to diverse employee groups and drawing on their creative talents; and 2) appealing to a diverse customer base (p. 70) which is an advantage needed to succeed in the today's diverse marketplace.

**ii. Theme Two:** Managing Diversity. In this section Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1997) identified that diversity in organizational settings is being managed in a variety of ways (p. 71). Therefore, their research on this topic concluded that there is "no single initiative that is comprehensive enough to solve all diversity issues or to successfully manage diversity in organizations" (p. 71). The also highlighted several diversity management barriers that have hindered the practice of managing diversity in organizations. These barriers include: "stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination,

harassment, difficulty in balancing work and family, poor career planning and development, lack of organizational political savvy, unsupportive work environments, exclusion and isolation, [having their] qualifications and performance questioned, lack of mentors and backlash" (p. 71).

Lastly, Wentling and Palma-Riva's (1997) uncovered in their research that diversity initiatives in organizations locally, nationally and globally will continue to thrive due to the fact that society in general is becoming more diverse (p. 71). The authors' inquiry additionally revealed that diversity training will remain a necessary initiative in organizations of the future at all levels due to the complexities surrounding human diversity issues in general (p. 71).

### The Role of Diversity Practitioners

Similar to Wentling and Palma-Rivas's (1997) study Maltbia's [21] research sheds light on what is known about workplace diversity from the perspectives of twelve external and internal diversity practitioners including diversity managers, diversity leaders and chief diversity officers (p. 371) and from his review of literature on workplace diversity (p. 401). An important theme that Maltbia's [21] uncovered was that many of the diversity practitioners stated that gaining and sustaining the personal commitment for organizational diversity efforts from senior leadership was a key factor as it relates to the overall results that diversity efforts will have within the organization (p. 396). Moreover, Maltbia's [21] literature review on workplace diversity revealed that the factors supporting the inclusion of diversity efforts in organizations include: 1) having a clear vision and rationale for engaging in the diversity process and 2) the courage to transform the people and organizational systems needed to realize the vision" (p. 401). However, the barriers found in this review of literature that hinder the employment of diversity efforts in organizations include: 1) fear, resistance to change at the individual level and 2) organizational barriers related to systems and practices that are not aligned with the aim of diversity (p. 401). In Maltbia's [20] earlier research on this topic he also discovered that diversity practitioners need to engage in self-work, a concept similar to self-awareness in order to develop and maintain the ability to effectively direct others through "the personal and organizational transformation needed to productively work with diversity" Maltbia's [20]. The process of self-work can be further understood and applied using two of the learning domains that Mezirow [21] discussed: instrumental learning and communicative learning.

First, instrumental learning is helpful as it relates to self-work and managing diversity. For example, monitoring the planning and controlling processes related to learning, how to conduct cultural programs for adults, organizational readiness assessment, and training needs assessment generally are used to set the groundwork in the early phases of the diversity process in a specific context. Next, communicative learning is appropriate

for understanding diversity, valuing diversity, and leveraging diversity because the emphasis is on the dynamics of learning to understand others.

Maltbia's [19] as well revealed that the concept of self-work parallels Goleman's [22]; Goleman's [23] work on emotional intelligence. Goleman explained that personal competence influences how people manage themselves; specifically, self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation that are at the core of this idea of personal competence. Therefore, according to Maltbia's [19], diversity practitioners must have a high level of emotional awareness with respect to how various primary, secondary, and organizational dimensions of diversity affect their performance and how their collective set of values guides what they pay attention to in organizations and, as a result, the interventions they select in the process of doing diversity work. Diversity practitioners also must have the ability to assess their own strengths and weaknesses related to general and specific diversity work Maltbia's [19]. Lastly, Maltbia's [19] asserted that diversity practitioners must possess the knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and courage to help employees (adult learners) challenge unconstructive assumptions, which often serve as obstacles to accomplishing the goals they seek to meet.

### **The Benefits of Incorporating Multicultural and Workforce Diversity Leadership Attributes and Diversity Efforts in Contemporary Leadership Practices**

The author of this paper and workforce diversity researchers agrees and assert that diversity and multicultural leadership and management knowledge, skills and abilities are core competencies that all organizational leaders should possess. Hughes [15]; Byrd and Scott [11]. In the last section it is underscored that organizational leaders need to continuously engage in self-work including diversity training, reading workforce diversity articles, and attending workforce diversity seminars, to be informed stay and prepared to lead an emergent diverse workforce. Moreover, it was noted that organizational leaders need to know that they have to build accountability into their policy and practices with regard to addressing the lingering issues of discrimination, racism, stereotyping, sexism, sexual orientation and ageism to name a few for the propose of creating a safe diverse and inclusive work environment for employees at all ranks to thrive in.

While a plethora of renowned traditional leadership practices have introduced us to the fundamental attributes, traits, and behaviors relevant for organizational leaders, the majority of them lack the mention of essential organizational diversity attributes that all organizational leaders should also possess. Therefore, as society and the workforce continue to become more diverse, it is critical that all traditional, current and emerging leadership theories incorporate diversity and multicultural leadership practices into their models and frameworks. This

must be considered for the purpose of introducing current and emerging organizational leaders to the types of knowledge, as well as skills, and abilities they will need to acquire to effectively lead and manage an evolving diverse workforce.

### **Conclusion**

Comprehending what this review of literature highlighted above makes us aware that creating an organizational "cultural that fosters and values cultural differences" Cox [8] requires a commitment from key organizational leaders. This review of literature also provided several perspectives on why the concept of diversity leadership and related issues and concerns should be understood and managed by organizational leaders today and beyond in our global society. Therefore, building upon traditional leadership practices by incorporating diversity and multicultural leadership traits, behaviors, and practices offers contemporary organizational leaders a new and essential leaning opportunity to enhance their 21<sup>st</sup> century organizational leadership and management practices.

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