

OD VALUES AND DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

There is ample evidence that “diversity is associated with improved problem-solving ability and creativity, greater cultural sensitivity to products and markets, a larger pool of qualified candidates, and a more flexible and environmentally responsive workforce” (Burke & O’Malley, 2022, p. 145). An organization that includes diverse members of marketing and product teams is often better able to develop products and services that meet the needs of its diverse customer community. Organizations that have better gender and racial representation on boards and in senior management positions have higher profits (Burke & O’Malley, 2022). Conversely, when organizations are troubled, they tend to insulate themselves from diverse perspectives, narrowing their ability to develop creative solutions, which accelerates their decline. Complicating progress in this area are a series of negative beliefs about diversity and inclusion, such as the belief that diversity slows down the organization and creates conflict, that enhancing diversity means lowering standards for performance, or that more diversity means that dominant groups will lose (Miller & Katz, 2002).

However, as Auger-Domínguez (2022) puts it, “pursuing diverse representation in the workplace alone won’t ensure that all employees feel included, valued, and physically and psychologically safe” (p. 5). Discriminatory behaviors still occur in the form of smaller or more nuanced incidents called microaggressions, everyday affronts that are frequently reported by people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ organizational members. These can come in the form of being left off of group emails, not being invited to meetings, being omitted from social invitations, or being given a backhanded compliment such as “I didn’t expect you to be so articulate.” Building a diverse workforce with representation matters but it cannot end there. Practices of belonging and inclusion are needed to truly leverage diversity. Miller and Katz (2002) write that “radical changes are needed also in both the structure and culture of most organizations—in their policies and practices, the skills and styles of their leaders, and the day-to-day interactions among all their people” (p. 1).

These day-to-day interactions are improved by adopting a set of inclusive behaviors across members of the entire organization to ensure that all members feel respected, valued, and heard. An inclusive organizational culture allows members to bring their authentic whole selves to the organization without having to hide, subsume, or dismiss aspects of their identity. People experience inclusion through a multifaceted lens at not only the individual level of dialogue and engagement with other members of their organization and teams, but also through team norms and rituals, leadership behaviors, language and mind-sets, and organizational policies and practices (Ferdman, 2021). A serious effort to create more inclusive organizations must address change at each of these levels. J. R. Thompson (2022), reflecting on his professional experience as a chief diversity officer, recommends grounding these change programs in data. He advises collecting and analyzing data to measure the impact of diversity and inclusion programs as well as measuring exclusive behaviors (interrupting, ignoring, or stealing other members’ ideas) and inclusive ones (calling attention to those who are being ignored or silenced).

Miller and Katz (2002, pp. 59–65) describe 11 inclusive behaviors that create breakthrough experiences among individuals and members of teams and that allow teams to reach greater heights of innovation and creativity:

1. All individuals must learn to greet others authentically.

2. Individuals must create a sense of safety for themselves and their team members.
3. In a truly inclusive environment misunderstandings are addressed and disagreements resolved as soon as possible.
4. Team members must take the time to listen, listen, listen, and respond when people share their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives.
5. Everyone must communicate clearly, directly, and honestly.
6. Everyone on the team needs to understand the group's tasks and how each task relates to the mission of the organization.
7. Every person on the team has a contribution to make, so make sure all voices are heard.
8. Ask other team members to share their thoughts and experiences, and accept all frames of reference.
9. Notice the behavior of each person on the team, and speak up if you think people are being excluded.
10. Make careful choices about when the team will meet and what it will work on.
11. And finally, be brave.

Leaders have a visible opportunity to role-model these behaviors, inviting dialogue about inclusion, engaging all members of the organization, explicitly seeking out opportunities to interrogate inclusiveness, and creating safe spaces for others (Ferdman, 2021). Today many organizations are hiring practitioners with OD experience and backgrounds to lead organizational change in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As you can see from the commonalities in the list of inclusive behaviors above and the OD values that we have described to this point, this is an important and growing area of focus.

CHANGES TO OD VALUES OVER TIME AND THE VALUES DEBATE

The humanistic roots of organization development began with its foundation as a field interested in individual growth and self-awareness. OD has always had theoretical, practical, and humanistic components, with focus varying in one of these three areas at times in its history (Friedlander, 1976). In a survey of OD practitioners on the subject of OD values, Shull, Church, and Burke (2013) found that practitioners do focus on business effectiveness, but not to the detriment of humanistic values. They write that "OD practitioners remain largely focused on employee welfare and driving positive change in the workplace. Humanistic values such as empowering employees, creating openness of communication, promoting ownership and participation, and continuous learning remain strong" (Shull et al., 2014, p. 25). Fewer practitioners reported that OD has a "touchy-feely" reputation, but they also noted a perception that the traditional values of the field are weakening (a perception that was held most strongly by newer practitioners).

This business results emphasis in organization development targets bottom-line results that can involve downsizing and job changes for individuals. Many observers