

Inclusion Initiatives

CULTURE AND DIVERSITY – THE NEXT FRONTIER

By Mario R. Medina



The need for equal acceptance has always existed, but now - *finally* - it's receiving the recognition it needs. We, as leaders in the education community, must recognize the gaps in acceptance that still exist in order to fully embrace these ideals. As leaders, it is important for us to get involved in leading new initiatives that promote competency, integrity, and an environment with vision in the workplace. As leaders in research administration, we should play a vital role in the development of ecosystems where diversity is valued, instead of simply tolerated.

Cultural diversity in the workplace exists where differences are accepted and embraced, including traditions, ideals, and or beliefs of employees based on race, age, background, values, or gender. An ecosystem, for our purposes in research administration, is the goal: a community where one can feel like an important and valued member, part of a team. This is a place where happy, helpful and others-minded people come to work to make a positive difference in each other's lives.

An article written in the *Harvard Business Review* indicates that millennial employees want to be proud of the organization they work for. They want to work for a successful, high-performing company and for leaders with a blend of competence, integrity and vision (Plau, 2016).

An examination of multiple studies (Maznevski, 1994) suggests that diversity can enhance the overall performance of a group.

To accomplish this, a leader must inspire a shared vision before they enlist others for a common plan. A leader may have to pioneer an

AS LEADERS IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION, WE SHOULD PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOSYSTEMS WHERE DIVERSITY IS VALUED, INSTEAD OF SIMPLY TOLERATED.

idea that is not in their comfort zone and take risks, so they must challenge the process and adopt change. We, as leaders, must recognize contributions from members, encourage collaboration and team spirit, and show that we care for individuals. People tend to follow the person and then the plan (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

We can all agree that developing a culturally diverse ecosystem will not only lead to a more positive work environment, but, by valuing different viewpoints, it opens the door to more creativity in

the workplace, which will lead to more productivity. It is important to note that when employees feel appreciated, they give more, they work harder and better, and they do their best. It is also important to maintain an environment of respect and appreciation, since an atmosphere that promotes a positive environment brings less stress to employees. When we care for other people, it will promote loyalty and trust between leadership and staff.

References:

- Plau, B. N. (2016). What do millennials really want at work? The same things the rest of us do. *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, 2-6. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2016/04/what-do-millennials-really-want-at-work?autocomplete=true>
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). *The leadership challenge*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Maznevski, M. L. (1994). Understanding our differences: Performance in decision-making groups with diverse members. *Human Relations*, 47(5), 531-552.



Mario Medina, PhD, CRA, is the Senior Associate Director in the Office of Research Administration with the Division of Research, Economic Development and Engagement at East Carolina University. He can be reached at medinam18@ecu.edu