White males represent only 43 percent of the U.S. work force. Within a few years, 75 percent of those entering the labor force will be women and minorities, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. The work force is getting smaller as well as changing in nature. To attract and keep the most qualified and productive workers, businesses must make changes in their management policies and practices that few employers or workers have anticipated or are prepared for. Among the companies that have promoted the benefits of a multicultural, diversified work force are Procter and Gamble, Digital Equipment Corporation, Avon, Xerox, Mobilê, Honeywell, Colgate-Palmolive, and Ortho Pharmaceutical. For example, Procter and Gamble has established special mentoring programs to help bring women and blacks into management by providing them information about organizational styles of management, leadership, communication, and networking. Digital Equipment Corporation has started a program to create management awareness of attitudes and assumptions about races and genders and how those attitudes and assumptions influence company and employee policies and behaviors. To manage a diversified work force, managers must learn to be sensitive to the cultural influences among their employees. Cross-cultural training is also crucial to success in international markets, as U.S. companies compete in a global market and form joint ventures that require the transfer of employees across continents. (18 annotated resources) (CML)
THE MULTICULTURAL WORK FORCE

For example, managers and supervisors need to be aware that methods of offering praise (or criticism) differ across cultures. Americans respond to personal recognition—they like to be singled out for their achievements. They are used to clear communication—even when it is to point out that they are doing something wrong. Japanese people, on the other hand, are team players. To single out one member of a group of Japanese workers for praise (or criticism) can cause great discomfort. To manage a diversified work force, managers must learn to be sensitive to unique differences.

Cross-cultural training is also crucial to success in international markets. Today, U.S. companies are heavily engaged in international business, forming joint ventures that require the transfer of employees across continents. "Intercultural relationships are fragile. Countless hazards are created by communication problems, differences in motivational and value systems, diverse codes of conduct, and even differences in orientation to fundamentals such as perceptions of time and space" (Copeland 1985, p. 51). Businesses and employees need cross-cultural skills to be competitive. For this reason, the lead established by companies that have recognized the benefits of empowering a multicultural work force and are working toward this end will offer direction to others that are just beginning to address this issue.

This Trends and Issues Alert provides resources that can be used in meeting the challenges posed by work force diversity.

Print Resources


Designed for supervisors, co-workers, and others, this booklet explores consequences of faulty communication, examination of personal assumptions, and ways to improve communication.


Although teletraining can bridge geographically distant populations, its success requires appropriate awareness of cultural differences and their integration in instructional design.

U.S. multinational organizations must face the reality that their work force lacks international or intercultural competence.


Illustrates some of the differences that cause problems for Americans working with people from other countries, here or abroad:


Retraining managers to supervise, develop, and retain workers from different cultural backgrounds should include information on stereotypes and assumptions, unwritten rules, membership, and cultural differences.


Human resource managers who value cultural diversity as a source of enrichment and opportunity can bring a wealth of benefits to a company.


Model corporate programs to address the cultural deprivation of many white, male managers are described.


Describes ways to change organizational systems, structures, and practices to eliminate subtle barriers and enhance workplace relationships, including awareness training, attitude change, and valuing diversity.


In the 21st century, racial and ethnic groups in the United States will outnumber whites for the first time. A multicultural society will be a challenge to govern and educate, and the definitions of the nation's way of life and institutions may change.


Analyzes cultural differences in orientation toward work and leisure among ethnic groups.


A West German electronics corporation designed a workshop to help managers communicate with U.S. business partners through awareness of U.S. communication styles, modes of expression, value patterns, and communication cues.

Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions. Ypsilanti: Eastern Michigan University, 1988. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 304 882). Among the 49 papers are the following:


Five-phase training module includes discussion of "outsider" experiences, membership in subcultures and subgroups, shared characteristics of culturally diverse individuals, cross-cultural simulation, and debriefing.


Describes a course on management in a cross-cultural environment using critical incidents, short stories, proverbs, games, and films.


Presents exercises designed to reduce provincialism and tighten cultural awareness.

Ogden, J. D. "Designing Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs for Business." (ED 304 901).

A 1-day orientation workshop addresses concepts of intercultural communication, awareness of oneself as a cultural being, and nonverbal codes.

Vistor, D. A. "Ethical Considerations in Designing the International Business Communication Course." (ED 304 900).

Addresses a dilemma facing persons working in multicultural situations: At what point should one reject the norms and values of one's own culture to accommodate those of another?


Describes a multicultural awareness program for Montreal bus drivers designed to improve their attitudes toward and services to multicultural customers.

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