

# TOLERANCE AS CIVILITY IN CONTEMPORARY WORKPLACE DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

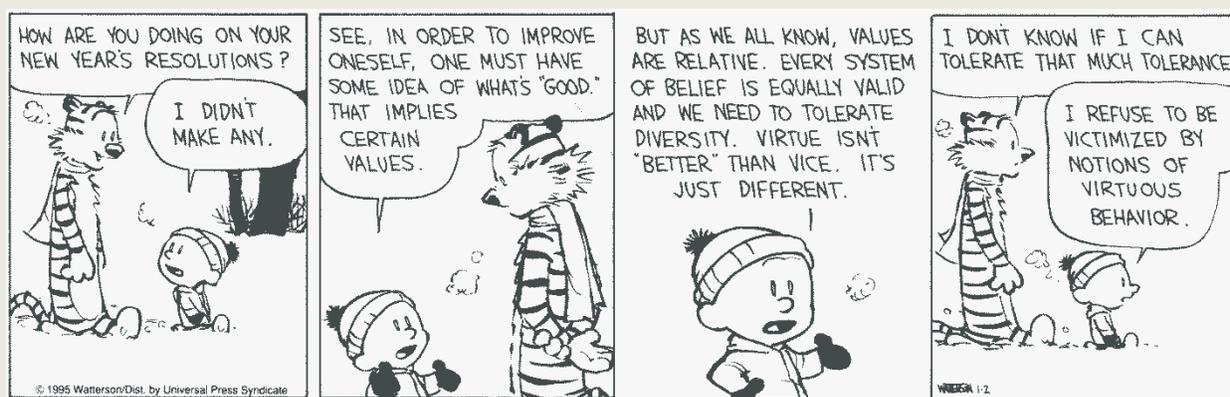
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*Valuing diversity emphasizes the awareness, recognition, understanding, and appreciation of human differences and revolves around creating an inclusive environment in which everyone feels esteemed. This generally takes place through a series of management education and training programs that attempt to improve interpersonal relationships among workers by asking participants to become more tolerant—generally understood today as an approval and acceptance of others’ practices, opinions, and beliefs. Because tolerance is such a highly desirable quality in U.S. society, and seemingly one of its few non-controversial values, rarely is its significance questioned. Nevertheless, contemporary interpretations of tolerance may be problematic for multicultural programs. Tolerance understood as respect and civility toward others is offered as a more appropriate and effective tool for easing hostile tensions between individuals and groups and for helping communities move past intractable conflict.*

*Keywords: tolerance, intolerance, civility, diversity, forbearance, acceptance*

## INTRODUCTION

**Figure 1. Calvin and Hobbes and Tolerance**



CALVIN AND HOBBS © 1996 Watterson. Dist. By UNIVERSAL UCLICK. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

**B**ill Watterson (1996), creator of the well-known comic strip Calvin and Hobbes, entertained us with the adventures of a 6-year old named Calvin. In the comic above, Calvin presents a lame defense to his stuffed tiger companion, Hobbes (who is real only to him) for not doing the right thing. Further, Calvin goes on to deny moral value having meaning for a philosophically urbane person such as himself. Hobbes serves as Calvin’s (often sarcastic) alter ego and expresses misgivings about Calvin’s concept of tolerance.

The authors agree with Hobbes concerning the current view of tolerance and tackle this controversial topic and its role in American society and business practice. We begin addressing the topic of tolerance by providing a brief discussion of the concept, identifying the classical meaning as involving forbearance and the contemporary meaning understood as including acceptance. In the next section, we review the idea of intolerance and then offer a discussion on the value of dialogue. The authors then present tolerance interpreted as civility, which falls somewhere between tolerance regarded as forbearance and tolerance viewed as acceptance, as a more appropriate construal of the term. Finally, we address tolerance within the context of diversity training in the workplace and conclude with a summary that emphasizes respect and dignity of all persons, rather than required acceptance and affirmation of everyone's beliefs, opinions, conduct, or entire ways of life.

## DISCUSSION

Although held in high regard by Locke (1689/1983), Voltaire (cited in Guterman, 1963), and Mill (1859/1985), the concept of tolerance often lacked widespread recognition. Colesante and Biggs (1999) noted that early Western religious scholars St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas viewed tolerance as a vice that could corrupt society and harm innocent people. Later, tolerance was seen as a permissive practice of allowing a person, practice, or thing of which one disapproved. Rather than being perceived as an evil, tolerance was seen as a relatively detached attitude incorporating the idea of forbearance, in which tolerant individuals "put up with" or endured what they found to be offensive in order to coexist with others (Schwartz, 1996).

While it may once have been good enough for minority groups to be tolerated or "put up with," today such an understanding of tolerance has become insufferable. What these groups now demand is not tolerance as *endurance*, but tolerance involving acceptance and celebration: "Who are you to 'tolerate' me? Who are you to say that my way of life is inferior to yours? Who are you to judge?" (Schwartz, 1996, p. 27). Today, some reject the orthodox definition of tolerance because it is only a half measure (Oberdiek, 2001). This has led Weissberg (2008) to claim that tolerance appears to have changed definition over the years from the obligation not to tolerate the perceived immoral and depraved to the requirement to accept the legitimacy of the morally different.

Contemporary understandings of tolerance involve "the ability to accept the values and beliefs of others" (Lickona, 2002, p. 1) and can be considered "indispensable for any decent society—or at least for societies encompassing deeply divergent ways of life" (Oberdiek, 2001, p. 23) characteristic of many Western cultures. Schwartz (1996), observed, "I think that most of the time what we have in mind when we speak of tolerance is something closer to 'acceptance,' or even '*celebration*.' Acceptance implies approval, and celebration implies *enthusiastic* approval" (p. 24, italics in original). Moreover, the absence of tolerance may well be considered the root of much evil: hate crimes, religious and political persecution, and terrorism (Lickona, 2002).

Weissberg (2008) believes that this new interpretation of tolerance requires affirming the rightness of the nonconventional and nontraditional. We believe that the U.N.'s decision to declare 1995 "The Year of Tolerance" confused toleration and affirmation when it declared tolerance as "respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.... It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1995). Such a definition, we believe, goes too far.

This newly fashioned tolerance often raises suspicion of the idea that something—or someone—may be offensive and rejects the idea that one can be free to express such distaste. To evaluate something as questionable or wrong and publicly say so can be considered xenophobic, insensitive, and offensive. Few ideas or behaviors can be opposed, regardless of how gracious the attempt, without inviting charges of being hateful or some other harsh accusation.

Tolerance as practiced today goes beyond respecting a person's right to think and behave differently. It demands that practically every ideology, value claim, or personal practice be made morally legitimate. It relentlessly promotes the idea of acceptance and discourages the questioning of other people's beliefs and lifestyles. Such affirmation and acceptance can be seen as a way of avoiding making difficult moral choices, and a way of disengaging from the challenge of explaining which values are worth upholding. It is far easier to dispense with moral judgment entirely than to explain why a certain way of life or belief should be embraced. In a world where all values are inherently equal



and a proclaimed hierarchy only reflects power, not demonstrable worth, why should anyone embrace capitalism over socialism, Islam in favor of Judaism, or the Democratic Party instead of the Republican Party? Indeed, why hold attachments to anything, since nothing could be better than anything else? To hold strong convictions in today's relativistic world subjects one to charges of bigotry, dogmatism, and fanaticism where few things can be worth defending.

Hallemeier (2006) suggests that tolerance today is considered essential, a highly desirable quality in U.S. society and one of its few non-controversial values (Kreeft, 2007). Many people insist that, in a world burdened by injustice, inequality, and related bigotry, the best solution to address these evils involves a greater degree of tolerance, generally understood today as an approval of others' views and behavior (Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference, 2009). Within the last generation, tolerance rose to the apex of America's public moral philosophy. Today, many believe a good, moral person to be tolerant, considering tolerance a virtue essential for democracy and civilized life. The lexicon of today's tolerance supporters requires approving others' principles and standards. Weissberg (2008) believes that to argue otherwise would invite charges of engaging in "mean-spirited, right-wing polemic endorsing hatefulness" (p. xi). Indeed, one of the worst things that could be said of a person today might be that they are intolerant. Such a moniker helps demonize certain individuals and groups by faulting their worldview as ignorant and bigoted.

Today, many consider tolerance so important that museums dedicated to it can be found in Los Angeles and in New York City. There is even an International Day for Tolerance that is observed on November 16 to educate people about the need for tolerance in society. Vogt (1997) believes that nowhere is this growing emphasis on tolerance more evident than in the prominence given it in education and training programs addressing issues of multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity.

The modern interpretation of tolerance, however, poses a dilemma: how can individuals be asked to accept all people's values and practices when they may believe some of those ideas and behaviors to be wrong? How, for example, can one ask supporters on opposite sides of the abortion and gay marriage debates to accept the validity of each other's perspectives? Recall the highly publicized case of Carrie Prejean, a contestant in the 2009 Miss USA Beauty Pageant. When openly gay pageant judge Perez Hilton questioned her views on gay marriage, Prejean replied that she believed marriage should be between a man and a woman, thus failing to approve gay marriage. Mr. Hilton called Ms. Prejean "the B word" on his popular blog and said he would have liked to have called her something stronger (Hilton, 2009). Consider also how Harvard's former president, Lawrence Summers, caused a furor in 2005 by speculating, at a private meeting, that innate gender differences might contribute to the paucity of women in top positions in math, science, and engineering at elite universities. In addition, Dr. Summers questioned how much of a role discrimination plays in the scarcity of female professors in science and engineering at such universities. It seems that even broaching the topic was enough to force his resignation (Mansfield, 2006).

These examples seem to suggest that certain views are unacceptable and that, if one sanctions them, they could be considered bigoted, ignorant, and worthy of derision—and could even be terminated from a job, as in Summers' case. A key question becomes, should everyone be required to approve, affirm, and celebrate all beliefs and conduct, even the following, in the name of tolerance?

- Condoms should be available to elementary school children.
- Islam should be banned because it is the carrier of different values and practices that are so alien to U.S. society that they are a threat to our national cohesion and even to our security.
- People with HIV/AIDS should be sterilized to help prevent the spread of the disease.
- Gay marriage should be banned in all states.

While many might find these comments abhorrent, are those who disagree with such statements prejudiced, hateful, bigoted, rigid, and intolerant? We suspect that this is not the case, since not *all* beliefs, behaviors, or both must be endorsed—only those largely sanctioned by those within the liberal tradition. Some researchers (e.g., Roberts & Lester, 2006) suggest that tolerance is universally recognized by both critics and supporters as central to liberalism. Self-proclaimed progressive professor Barry Schwartz (1996) noted that "As good liberals in a liberal society—and

especially as citizens of that bastion of liberalism, the academy—we value tolerance... we deeply believe that tolerance is the one virtue of character on which a liberal, pluralistic society most depends" (p. 24). Unfortunately, the graciousness implied in the "appreciate differences" brand of tolerance may be selective, with only those residing on the political spectrum's progressive flank deserving acceptance. For example, while gays and civil rights groups are generally applauded, one might typically find silence when it comes to fundamentalist Christians or the military. Such a one-sided interpretation of tolerance as acceptance of primarily liberal views often engenders the very divisiveness it proposes to eliminate.

Beliefs and conduct not aligned with more liberal leanings are readily dismissed. This was illustrated by Professor Schwartz (1996) who stated that "It is simply not possible for me to approve of committed anti-abortionists demonstrating outside abortion clinics. And it is simply not possible for me to approve of Jews who won't allow women to see, let alone read from the Torah" (p. 28). We agree, and feel that there may be issues and beliefs that one should not be forced to approve. Furthermore, we concur with Oberdiek (2001) who argued that "It would be unreasonable—worse, utterly wrong—to demand that we should tolerate every divergent belief, or practice" (p. 4, ).

## DIVERSITY TRAINING

Promoting and advocating tolerance as acceptance is widespread today and continues to be taught extensively with its endorsement central to many diversity and multicultural training initiatives (Clements & Jones, 2008). According to Lansing and Cruser (2009), diversity training is considered so important today that it can be found as a common topic now incorporated in nearly every major collegiate and graduate business program. Benjamin (1996) observed that, in higher education, students are told that diversity training should emphasize "tolerance... and respect for differences in appearance, values and attitudes, perspectives, assumptions, and conduct" (p. 155). Additionally, *Teaching Tolerance Magazine* showcases innovative tolerance initiatives across the U.S.

Diversity training can also be found in the workplace. An industry report on training in the United States prepared by the widely circulated practitioner-oriented *Training Magazine* indicated that 72% of responding companies offered some form of diversity training (Galvin, 2003). Additionally, the Society for Human Resource Management found that 67% of U.S. organizations provided multicultural training program initiatives (Esen, 2005). A key component of such programs involves teaching tolerance. For example, when the key terms "diversity training in the workplace" and "tolerance" were recently entered in the Google search engine, about 250,000 hits registered, illustrating tolerance as a key component of inclusion and multicultural training (Von Bergen, 2012).

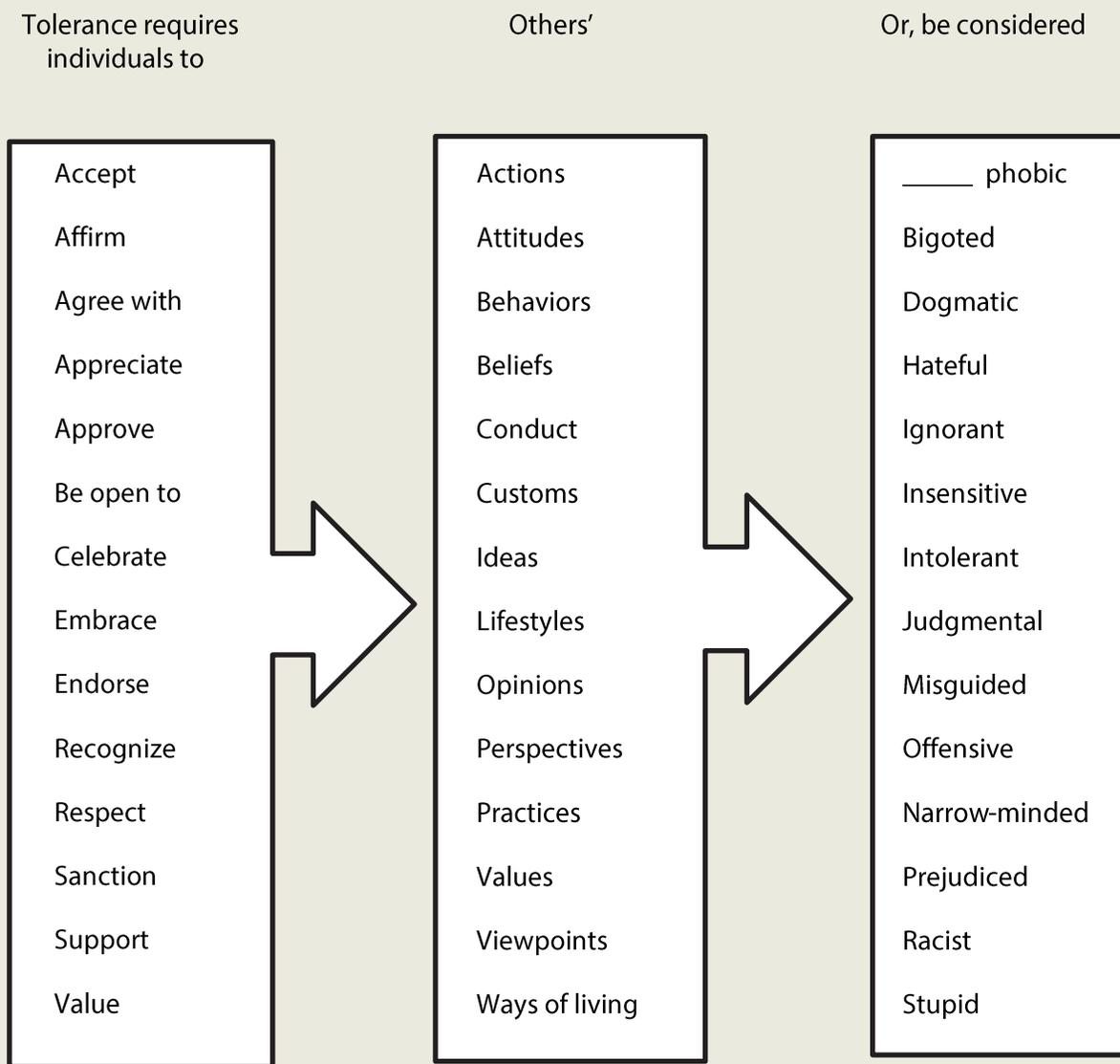
In these developmental efforts to value diversity, it is often common to hear that individuals should recognize and acknowledge differences and be inclusive and open to them (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1993). Hence, trainees are encouraged to applaud differences and to create a climate of tolerance that entails appreciation, approval, and acceptance of a myriad of dissimilarities despite some authors' warnings that excessive emphasis upon the differences between Americans could produce a Balkanization of U.S. society (Schlesinger, 1992).

In diversity training workshops, participants are frequently told that everything should be considered different—not better or worse, but equivalent—and that a person's view should automatically be considered wrong if it rejects the equal legitimacy of all views. There is a litany of words and phrases that, like bullets from a machine gun, are shot in rapid fire reflexively to assault the character (using slander, coercion, and pejorative personal attacks) and motivations of those who may question such an understanding of tolerance (see Figure 2). Supporters of tolerance, today regarded as acceptance, tell individuals who may question or disagree with them that they should \_\_ (pick one or more of the verbs in Column 1 from Figure 2) others' \_\_ (pick one or more of the words in Column 2) and that, if they do not, then they are subject to being called one or more of the names listed in Column 3. For example, an individual may be told that if they disagree with a belief in man-made global warming then they are ignorant, uninformed, and stupid. If someone thinks another is wrong, they are called intolerant (Kouki, 2003).

Those who oppose an understanding of tolerance as an approval of unconditional liberal-leaning opinions and perspectives are often considered legalistic individuals with non-negotiable doctrinal convictions, deserving, in some cases, to be terminated from their job. It seems that having firmly-held beliefs inconsistent with politically liberal biases is problematic. Henle and Holger (2004) indicated that AT&T representatives seemed to have thought

this when they fired Albert Buonanno after he refused to agree to portions of the company’s employee handbook that he believed violated his religious beliefs. At AT&T, all employees were required to sign a written acknowledgment that they had received the firm’s new employee handbook and sign a “Certificate of Understanding.” The certificate contained a statement that the employee signing it “agreed with and accepted” all of the terms and provisions of the handbook, including its policies and rules. The handbook contained a provision that “each person at AT&T Broadband is charged with the responsibility to fully recognize, respect and value the differences among all of us,” including “sexual orientation.” However, Mr. Buonanno’s strongly held religious beliefs regarding the homosexual lifestyle prevented him from approving the practice of homosexuality.

**Figure 2. Sequence of intimidation regarding tolerance**



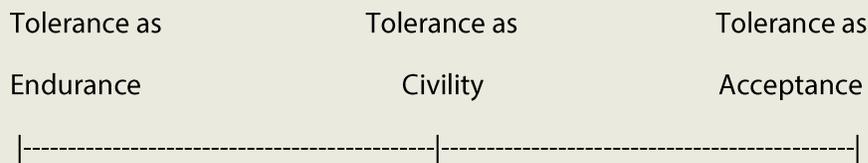
Buonanno shared his concerns with his immediate supervisor and informed him that he had no problem declaring he would not discriminate against or harass people who were different from him, including homosexuals, but that he could not sign the statement because it contradicted his sincerely held religious beliefs. Mr. Buonanno stated, “As a Christian, I love and appreciate all people regardless of their lifestyle. But I cannot value homosexuality and any different religious beliefs.” AT&T informed Buonanno that they would terminate him should he refuse to sign the certificate. He declined to sign the document, and AT&T immediately terminated his employment. Mr. Buonanno then sued AT&T, resulting in his winning an award of \$146,260.00 in damages (*Buonanno v. AT&T Broadband LLC*, 2004,

p. 155). According to Hudson (2004), employers should not force workers to adopt beliefs inconsistent with their religious beliefs, and “employees shouldn’t be forced to forswear their religious values in the name of tolerance” (p. 1C). Must we embrace difference or does it suffice if the occurrence of difference is considered to be a normal state of affairs?

## TOLERANCE AS CIVILITY

We believe that it is extremely important to preserve a notion of tolerance that is neither “putting up with,” which demands too little of us, nor “acceptance,” which demands too much. We offer tolerance incorporating civility as occupying a middle ground which lies somewhere between traditional and contemporary interpretations. This view involves treating people with whom we differ neither with appreciation, acceptance, nor endorsement, but with civility, dignity, and courtesy even as we recognize that some conflict and tension is inevitable (see Figure 3). Individuals, we feel, should be shown basic respect as human beings even if they hold beliefs that others may not value. Like Ury (1999), we believe that “tolerance is...showing respect for the essential humanity in every person” (p. 127).

**Figure 3. Three interpretations of tolerance**



Billante and Saunders (2002) surveyed the literature on civility and suggested three elements that together constitute the term. The first element is respect for others. The second element is civility as public behavior towards strangers. This is similar to Carter’s (1998) view that “civility equips us for everyday life with strangers.... We need neither to love them nor to hate them in order to be civil towards them” (p. 58). The third element is self-regulation in the sense that it requires empathy by putting one’s own immediate self-interests in the context of the larger common good and acting accordingly.

Note that respect is accorded the person. Whether his or her ideas or behavior should be tolerated is an entirely different issue. Tolerance of individuals requires that each person’s viewpoint receives a courteous hearing, not that all views have equal worth, merit, or truth. Rejecting another’s ideas or practices should not be equated with disrespect for the person. The view that no person’s beliefs may be any better than another’s can be considered irrational and absurd. It would be inappropriate to tolerate such things as racism, sexism, or hate speech. This view is consistent with renowned psychotherapist Albert Ellis’ (2004) concept of unconditional other-acceptance, which declares that one is not required to “tolerate the antisocial and sabotaging actions of other people.... But you always accept them, their personhood, and you never damn their total selves. You tolerate their humanity while disagreeing with some of their actions” (p. 212, italics in original). Ellis’ observation is consistent with the Kantian perspective that “human beings are to be regarded as worthy of respect as human beings, regardless of how their values differ and whether or not we disapprove of what they do” (Hill, 2000, p. 69). Simply by virtue of their humanity, all people qualify for a status of dignity that should be recognized by all.

Tolerance as advocated here incorporates civility and involves treating others with respect and dignity without necessarily agreeing with or accepting their values, practices, or the importance of these practices to the way of life of the people who engage in them. Key components of tolerance construed as incorporating a large dose of civility include dialogue and openness to others. The richest form of civil dialogue should not be construed as merely an exchange of information, but rather a process in which the participants actively question their own perspectives and include the other as a partner in their cultural self-exploration and learning (Richardson, 2003). Dialogue involves 1) self-exploration, as much as learning about the other, and 2) the articulation of one’s own previously implicit values and assumptions, as much as learning what might be valued by others. This type of exchange can lead to greater self-understanding as well as a thoughtful consideration of another’s perspective. It can also help one recognize and begin to address inconsistencies, tensions, and blind spots in one’s thinking. This kind of dialogue can be a



productive way to question the values and standards of one's cultural community in light of other viewpoints. At its best, dialogue can be challenging and enriching and can result in greater clarity about, and sometimes alterations in, one's own worldview. Such dialogue introduces profound possibilities for self-examination and transformation in ways that members of diverse groups understand: what might be good for them, what might be praiseworthy, and how to bring that goodness into being.

Of course, some may hold certain beliefs or practices that are so unacceptable that others who do not share those beliefs cannot enter into dialogue with those who keep them. Covey (1989), in his very successful text, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, referred to a similar concept when he suggested that people should "seek first to understand, then to be understood" (p. 235). This is similar to empathy and can be intended to improve communication by suggesting that individuals listen with the intent to understand others' perspectives; not listen solely with the intent to reply.

Tolerance as civility allows differing views to have an equal right to exist, although not necessarily to have an equal share in truth. These are different issues. Indeed, the view that all values are equal and immune from criticism might be intolerant of the belief that moral judgments can be made. Tolerance suggesting civility does not excuse individuals from resolving conflicting claims to truth. Can it be considered intolerant to claim the sun as the center of our solar system because others might think the earth to be the center? Should scholars be considered intolerant when they believe one hypothesis true and another false?

Tolerance comprising courteousness recognizes the rights of others to both have and express their opinion. If individuals can learn to respect the rights of all human beings to have and express their understanding of reality, whether they agree with them or not, then everyone will be one step closer to living in a truly charitable world. People can respect those who hold different beliefs by treating them politely and allowing their views a place in community discourse. Persons may strongly disagree with each other's ideas, and vigorously contend against them in the public square, but still display respect for individuals despite those differences.

Tolerance as civility does not mean accepting another person's belief; only his or her right to have that belief. It is similar to the famous words (some say falsely) attributed to Voltaire: "I detest what you write, but I would give my life to make it possible for you to continue to write" (Guterman, 1963, p. 143). We can strongly disagree with others' ideas or conduct and forcefully oppose them in the public square, but we still must show respect for individuals in spite of those differences. People should be inclusive of others, but they should not be required to incorporate those beliefs or approve the behaviors (Kouki, 2003). Persons should listen to and learn from everyone, but not feel obligated to agree with every person, accept their viewpoints, or approve of their conduct. It can be considered a disservice to all when believing that tolerance, respect, charity, and dignity imply never saying or doing anything that might upset someone. Indeed, Barrow (2005) goes so far as to say that protesting that one is being offended by our interpretation is "one of the supreme self-serving acts," and "that taking offence, when it means treating one's personal hurt as grounds for punitive response, involves a refusal to show tolerance, to allow freedom or to play fair—for why should you be allowed to say what you want, when others are denied that right by you" (p. 273)?

### Tolerance as Civility in Other Cultures

The conceptualization of tolerance as civility presented here seems consistent with Eastern and African thinking. Asian societies, particularly countries like China, Japan, and South Korea, stress building harmonious interpersonal relationships through avoidance of conflict and compliance with social norms. Jiang (2006) observed the atmosphere of harmony in the teachings of Confucius, from whom tolerance implies harmony without conformity. Lo (2006) stated that a true Confucianist or Confucianism-inspired person would graciously allow for differences in beliefs and values for the sake of harmony based on benevolence and love, but would but not necessarily feel obligated to accept and endorse them. Similarly, Kani (2006) describes how the concept of Ubuntu is woven into the fabric of South African society. Ubuntu represents a collection of values for treating others with harmony, respect, sensitivity, dignity, and collective unity simply because of a person's humanness. The Ubuntu value system provides a framework for how people should treat others and values a collective respect for everyone in the system. An imperative delineated from Ubuntu can be that it remains important to treat others as family, i.e., with kindness, compassion, and humility. Indeed, Mangalisco (2001) noted that "treat[ing] others with dignity and respect...is a cardinal point of Ubuntu. Everything

hinges on this canon, including an emphasis on humility, harmony, and valuing diversity” (p. 32).

We believe these African- and Asian-based principles to be clearly consistent with and present a strong argument for tolerance viewed as civility as presented here. As such, there could be important implications for a cross-cultural managerial practice of tolerance construed as respect for others. Managers in charge of multinational firms with operations in African or Asian countries would be well-advised to take heed of the concept of tolerance promulgated here and develop their corporate diversity programs accordingly.

Good people will sincerely disagree, and the issues that divide them by their very nature impassion them. Individuals can, however, disagree without demonizing those with whom they differ. In civility, persons affirm the dignity and essential worth of others even when they express ideas deemed disagreeable or offensive. It is understood that compromise solutions or common ground cannot be found for all issues, but that does not justify engaging in the harsh, vilifying, and over-the-top rhetoric often seen today.

### Rising Incivility: An Impediment to Dialogue

Unfortunately, the recent increase of incivility—insensitive, impolite, disrespectful, or rude behavior directed at another person that displays a lack of regard for that person (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001)—appears to have quite the opposite effect as increasing levels of boorishness steal from people their dignity and humanity. Indeed, Cortina (2008) views incivility as a form of modern discrimination in organizations. Americans believe their countrymen are “becoming more rude and less civilized,” and a poll by Weber Shandwick (2011) revealed that 94% of respondents considered the general tone and level of incivility in the country to be a problem that has increased over the last several years.

This level of discourteousness fueled the creation of several civility-enhancing institutes, including the Workplace Bullying Institute (n. d.), the Civility Institute (n. d.) at Johns Hopkins University, and the National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD; n. d.) at the University of Arizona. The NICD, with honorary chairs Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, stands as a national, nonpartisan center for debate, research, education and policy generation regarding civic engagement and civility and constructive engagement in public discourse, where discussion and vigorous debate can take place in a polite and courteous manner. One of the key goals for the institute is to connect with people with diverse viewpoints and to offer a venue for vigorous and respectful debate while allowing for structured dialogue and deliberation that ensures all points of view are expressed and understood. It is through the clash of conflicting ideas and opinions that insights into truth may be gained. Even erroneous views, in the act of their being challenged, can contribute to the overall clarity of public life (Furedi, 2011). The institute inspires the search for more informed and creative decision-making, but does not expect people to change their values or perspectives. Certainly tolerance, understood as involving civil, respectful relationships, can be a useful instrument utilized by the NICD.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Tolerance historically meant that persons must be willing to put up with others’ beliefs and conduct that they found objectionable. Today, however, tolerance increasingly means not only approving those views and behaviors with which one may disagree and find objectionable, but also celebrating and endorsing them—at least those having a decidedly liberal tilt. Nonetheless, some (e.g., Lickona, 2002) seem to question the tolerance as acceptance rhetoric imposed on the public today.

Tolerance must incorporate respect and dignity for everyone. Individuals can be tolerant without the requirement to adopt others’ thinking or convictions. Inclusiveness should not demand that differences be denied or proscribed. Tolerance as endorsed here employs respect and civility for persons, since every individual possesses inherent value. It does not require embracing another’s belief; only affirming his or her right to have that belief. Tolerance as civility entails no obligation to esteem others’ ways of life as a morally informed way of life, nor does it decree that we be silent about our differences. Tolerance interpreted as civility does, however, strongly encourage us to explore the terrain between forbearance and acceptance, exploring possibilities of mutual understanding and accommodation along the way.

We advocate civility toward others with whom we disagree—a civility that includes courtesy toward others and



the approval of them as a basic object of moral concern. Civility permits conflict and criticism of others' beliefs and practices, but it limits the ways in which this conflict can be pursued. For criticism to be civil, it cannot be blind, based on stereotypes or debasing opposing viewpoints, but rather requires knowledge and basic concern for the identity and voice of others.

This approach is similar to various presidential appeals for civility. As a teen, George Washington copied into a school workbook "110 Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation." The first of Washington's rules of civility said, "Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present" (Washington & Brookhiser, 2003, p 1). President George H. W. Bush, in a commencement address at the University of Michigan in 1991, indicated that "We must conquer the temptation to assign bad motives to people who disagree with us" (Bush, 1991/2010). In spring 2009, amid much public controversy and protest demonstrations, President Obama delivered the commencement address at Notre Dame University. Some "pro-life" persons thought that the president should not be invited to speak at a Catholic university because his "pro-choice" position on abortion contradicts Church doctrine, and many objected to the university awarding him an honorary degree. President Obama devoted a section of his address to the protests—not on the merits of one abortion position over another—but rather on public discourse; i.e., on how Americans should engage in public debate on issues with which they fundamentally disagree. Mr. Obama observed that while opposing views would and should be presented with passion and conviction, they could be done "without reducing those with differing views to caricature" (Obama, 2009). Then he suggested a model: "Open hearts. Open minds. Fair-minded words" in the context of "... friendship, civility, hospitality and especially love" (Obama, 2009). These presidential words are remarkably consistent with the interpretation of tolerance as civility suggested here.

We support the idea of a truly pluralistic society, in which differing views have an equal and legal right to exist, but not a society in which ideologically driven interest groups require all to accept their worldviews, where disagreement is often misconstrued as bigotry, stupidity, and hatred, and where tolerance simply means required acceptance. We are reminded of the words of noted English philosopher William Rowe who said: "... those who are most eloquent in demanding freedom for their own views and practices are the first to deny freedom of thought or action to their neighbors" (1930).

## Implications for Managers

Weissberg (2008) suggests that those attending diversity workshops that encourage tolerance should respectfully engage trainers regarding their definition of the term and question interpretations that imply that participants should appreciate and affirm all differences and "accept everything" (p. x). We agree with Bennett (2001) that "properly understood, tolerance means treating people with respect and without malice; it does not require us to dissolve social norms or to weaken our commitment to ancient and honorable beliefs" (p. 138). Such an understanding of tolerance, what we refer to as tolerance as civility here, can enhance diversity training program effectiveness and can be a valuable approach to addressing inclusion in organizations and institutions. Tolerating or respecting people, however, must never be confused with accepting and endorsing all their ideas and practices.

Not only is civility an important interpersonal value in the workplace, but it is also a meaningful predictor of organizational performance (King, Dawson, West, Gilrane, Peddie, & Bastin, 2011). Subtle mistreatment characteristics of incivility have been shown to negatively impact job satisfaction, job withdrawal, career salience, psychological distress (Cortina et al., 2001), and self-reported physical health problems (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). King et al. (2011) observed that firms can improve performance by creating and maintaining norms of civility. Training programs and leadership activities may help employees overcome their (often unconscious) behavioral tendencies to disfavor out-group members by encouraging—indeed demanding—civility in all interactions. Given the resistance and backlash that sometimes arise in response to terms such as "diversity," "inclusion," and "discrimination," it is possible that focusing on civility instead could improve the efficacy of existing multicultural training programs. Some research suggests that addressing civility, incorporating empathy or perspective taking skills (Galinsky, Wang, & Ku, 2008), and reciprocity (Kolm, 2000) may be effective in enhancing civility.

## Implications for Further Research

As the discussion and debate on tolerance continues, more research is needed to examine various workplace situations. For example, it would be interesting to know how intolerance and incivility impact customers, suppliers, and other relevant stakeholders in the business. Should diversity training workshops be modified or improved to include more discussion on tolerance? How are bullying and lack of civility related? Do employees and others understand that diversity of thought and ideas could be considered equally important to diversity of gender, race, religion, and other demographic characteristics? Additional research in these areas could help lead toward a breakthrough in understanding the importance of tolerance in the work environment—and in society in general.

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